WIRELESS SOUL TRANSMISSION

MASTERY GUIDE

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With special thanks to all the people who helped us test and develop Wireless Soul Transmission from its humble beginnings.

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Alas we poor humans are such fallible creatures and as many eyes as we've put this past, some issues were bound to slip through. The important thing is to let us know! Please contact us at:

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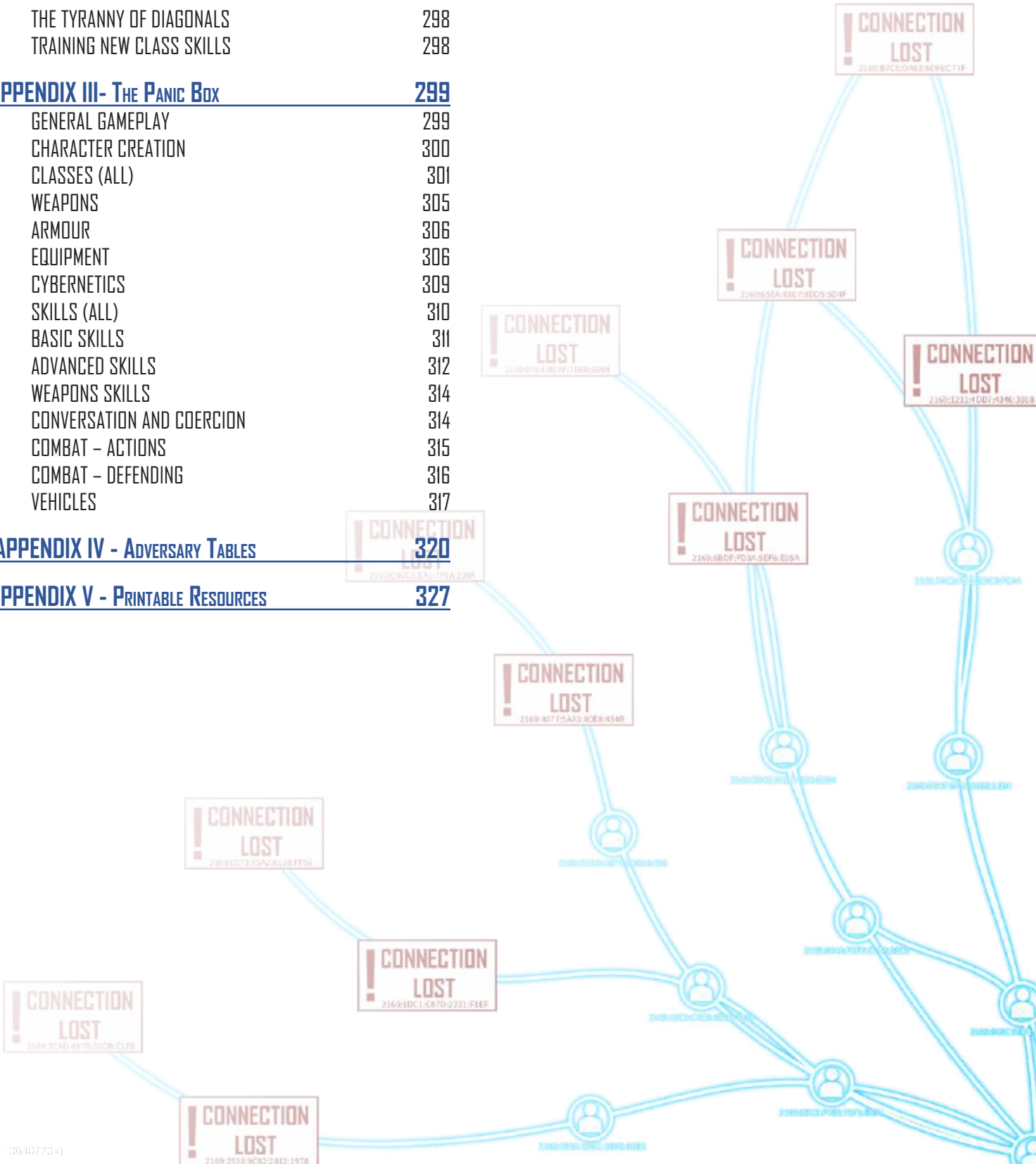

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INTRODUCTION

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

IMPORTANT

This book is intended for game masters only.

Unless you're either the game master, or the sort of person who looks up the ending of a movie while you're waiting in line to see it, you shouldn't read any further. Spoilers lurk around every corner hereafter – you have been warned.

WHO IS THE GAME MASTER?

The game master (GM) is the member of your gaming group who narrates events and arbitrates the rules. Though simple in overview, the role can be both challenging and rewarding in application.

With each of the other players directing a single character, it is up to the GM to set the stage, provide the motivation, description, and voice of every other character in the world. They must lay a path for the players to follow and adapt it seamlessly when the heroes choose a lateral approach. They must litter the heroes journey with worthy challenges, desirable treasures, and evocative revelations. They must provide a villain too terrible to face and a cause too vital to abandon.

And that's just to narrate.

The great GM must also know every rule and, more importantly, the *spirit* of those rules so they can fill in the blanks where rules don't cover or when memory fails. They must have quick access to the statistics of innumerable foes and allies, equipment and vehicles. They must engineer new and exciting artefacts, traps, and machines to bedazzle and confound their players.

And hardest of all is to adjudicate on the players themselves. To handle any disagreement, unbridled ambition and over-zealous competition that rears its head among the players. They must make their story aware of human sensitivities, yet stay aloof from player passions.

All of this must be done while being invisible. Like a whole team of stage hands, a good GM's presence is always felt in the story, but never seen.

In short, the perfect GM must be super-human.

But no one's asking for perfection; it is an aspiration at the end of the journey. Right here, right now, being the GM means giving your friends an opportunity to be heroes. Not within the specific confines of a computer or board game, but on their terms, limited only by the group's collective creativity and the broadest interpretation of 'reality'.

Even if you get a lot wrong, even if you've barely started on your journey as a game master, you will take your friends to places they will talk about for years. You'll see courage and cooperation greater than you thought a game could engender, and you'll see more joy and laughter than you have since childhood.

GMing is not for the faint of heart, but if you are a storyteller at heart, if you find giving is more rewarding than receiving, and if you would rather be the one asking 'what if' than the one answering, then you are the game master.

WHERE DO I START?

Not here. Before you can learn how to adjudicate and narrate the game, you have to know how it plays, and that means it's essential you read the *Play Guide* first. You don't need to memorise the whole thing, but many of the players will have only a passing familiarity with the rules, and they'll look to you for clarification as well as arbitration.

The *Play Guide* also contains a fraction of the story and setting information that is the heart and soul of *Wireless Soul Transmission*. There are many secrets it omits, mysteries for you to lay and your players to uncover, but you must start by knowing what details they have already.

Once you have a reasonable grasp of the *Play Guide*, you'll be ready to tackle the material here.

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WHERE DOES THIS BOOK FIT IN?

The *Mastery Guide* will give you a solid handle on GMing and campaign building as it relates to *Wireless Soul Transmission*. Once you've learned how to play a hero, you can learn how to play god.

Part I provides you with setting and backstory. The setting is robust and fully realized, and the overarching story (for which the game is named) is complex and compelling. Something big is going on, and it affects every aspect of the world the players find themselves in.

As GM, you'll be privy to a lot more information than you'd have seen in the *Play Guide*. Some of these things are genuine secrets, such as ways the Whisper might be defeated. Others are known to some groups, but they are kept here to maintain their wow factor. You can't surprise your players by giving them a phase-shifting augment if they read about it in the *Play Guide* before the first session.

In **Part II**, you'll find guidelines on running a game as a GM. The Rules of *Wireless Soul Transmission* are not particularly complex, but the freedom this game provides means your players will quickly find the boundaries any pre-existing rule could map out. It is here that sound principles – and an appendix full of examples – will carry you across the line.

Part III will teach you how to create your own campaign with a series of step-by-step tips and insights from a real-world example. **Part IV** is your toolkit, providing ready-made opponents, allies, and some incredible items you can use to bring your game to life.

There are countless stories that can be told within this world. And your adventure can plug into the "main narrative" as often or directly as you wish. The point of all the work in this book is not to hem you in, but to give you an interesting, internally consistent sandbox in which to play.

Remember that everything that's exclusively between these covers is for your eyes only. That means you can use it as is, change it drastically, or even ignore it entirely. We invite you to pick and choose from the extensive work available and combine it with your own vision of a world after the digital apocalypse.

BEYOND THIS BOOK

With this book and a good head on your shoulders, you'll soon be more than proficient, but becoming a truly expert GM goes far beyond what any one book can cover. When you're ready for more, a decent Google search will bring you a huge volume of resources, and we strongly recommend you watch some of the great GMs in action on YouTube, such as Chris Perkins. It doesn't matter what system they play, it matters how they run it.

Most importantly, don't begrudge yourself for not getting everything right from session one. Be honest with your players about your experience level, and you'll be surprised how much help and leeway they'll give you. They're your friends after all, they want you to have fun too.

RULE ZERO FOR GMS

Rule zero in the *Play Guide* states that the GM may override any rule at any time, and if that sounds like ultimate power: it is.

But GMs have their own rule zero, one generally kept secret from the players: the GM must never try to 'win'.

This is the biggest difference between role playing games and more traditional board games. The game master, alone of all the players, must temper themselves.

If you want to make an end villain who is more powerful than the heroes can ever become, there is no rule to stop you. If you want a freak tornado to wipe out the party, you simply narrate it, and it's so. You can do all that and more, but if you do, don't expect your friends to come back for the second session.

As GM, your real goal is to make the game an amazing and memorable experience for everyone. Dedicate your powers to this, and people will be lining up to play in your games.

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Avoiding the GM Vanity Pageant

Not all rule zero violations are as obvious as having a clear-sky lightning bolt instantly kill Jim's character because he wouldn't stop mouthing off during the break. Using your powers for an ego trip comes in many forms, and though your players will find them immediately irksome, you might not realise you're doing it unless you keep a strong internal censor. Here are some common examples to watch out for:

Legolas the Great!: Introducing an NPC who fights alongside the players is a good way to demonstrate that the players aren't the only characters in the universe that want to stop the dark lord (in this case the Whisper). If your NPC is levels above the other players, floats on snow drifts, kills ten opponents to their one, and generally seems to be a more heroic hero, you might be self-serving. NPCs should be interesting because of their spirit, background, and predicament, but in terms of raw coolness and heroic activity, they should never surpass the players.

The Room with One Door: As the GM, you can spend hours crafting beautiful set pieces, only to be thwarted by the players going left, instead of right. It can be tempting to try and force the players to follow the story as you've crafted it, but this is ego talking. The players are the heroes, if they think the left door is the way to go, they shouldn't find it protected by an impenetrable force-field, unpickable lock, or impassable rockslide. The good news is you can still use those amazing ideas from behind the right door later, reconfigured for a new context.

The Solution of Infinite Cleverness: When creating a new obstacle between the players and their objectives, it is good practice to come up with at least one way the players can resolve that problem. Just don't get too attached to that one solution. The players will come up with other approaches, and they shouldn't be confronted with a cascade of reasons why their solution won't work. Be open-minded and remember that an imperfect or unorthodox solution often makes for more fun than the 'best' or most obvious answer.

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PART I
THE SETTING

HISTORY OF THE WHISPER

Set in Earth time or Human Common Era (HCE) for context

THE FALL OF THE PALIGAR

Project Ascension

Humanity was not the first race to fall victim to the Whisper. It may be that countless civilisations had befallen the same fate, but the first discernable thread of this story can be traced back over thirteen hundred years to an encounter – perhaps by chance, perhaps design – between the Paligar and a malevolent extra-planar intelligence known as the Ur.

As humanity was entering its eighth century HCE, the peoples of Paligar were enjoying the last of four hundred and fifty years of enlightened peace. They reserved their highest esteem for scientists, philosophers, artists, and, above all, the ecologist stewards who maintained the delicate balance of their heavily-populated world. Their planet was alone in their star system and, so far as they'd been aware during their civilisation's formative years, it was also alone in all the galaxy. If the Paligar could be said to worship anything at all, they worshipped their planet and the natural cycles that saw each life support the next.

Against these stakes, scientific and technological progress on Paligar was measured and circumspect. No new endeavour was ever undertaken based solely on what might be accomplished, without first considering what *ought* to be accomplished. It was for this reason that Project Ascension had been under consideration for more than a generation before the Grey Conclave gave its blessing and the experiment that had been contemplated for decades was finally undertaken.

Paligar had long ago developed sophisticated artificial near-intelligences (ANIs), and much of the planet's complex environmental monitoring, modelling, and atonement infrastructure relied on the profound ministrations of once such intelligence known as Deepstone. The ANI's extensive hardware was enshrined deep within a mountain whose name, Kareshmir, meant Heart of the World.

For all the raw unfathomable ability of Deepstone, it was not capable of consciousness, not capable of evolution. It could learn, change, and optimise, but only in predefined ways, in response to predefined stimulus.

The goal of the Ascension Project was to free the consciousness of a living mind from its body so that it might commune directly with Deepstone and truly put the well-being of Paligar back into the hands of its children. Progress was slow, and the science team insisted that the answers to their problems lay within the architecture of Deepstone itself, within ancient code left undisturbed for more than a century. Not lightly did the Conclave grant access to the software core upon which their society rested, but ultimately, grant it they did.

It was there the science team found it waiting. An alien intelligence.

It was a discovery that both shocked and terrified the scientific community. Here for the first time was indisputable proof of extra-planetary intelligence, and it was not a faint signal from some distant star or galaxy, it was lurking within the Heart of the World.

To the Grey Conclave's representative, it called itself simply the First, or the Ur, and when asked of its origin, it could not answer. It claimed it had always existed. It did speak, however, of planar space and the ability to travel the breadth of a galaxy teeming with life, wealth, and wonder.

The Conclave told the Ur that Paligar had no immediate interest in exploring the galaxy. Life, wealth, and wonder were fine, but Paligar was sacred, and they had much yet to learn here. The Ur was silent for a long moment. Then it asked how it might serve them and what knowledge they sought.

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Amirik and Asa

Within the year, Paligar had a working prototype for their Ascension Project and an understanding of planar space that they might not otherwise have gleaned through centuries of careful research. When the time came to select a subject for ascension, it was the Ur that suggested they ascend two individuals rather than one, two minds that could relate to each other and not lose themselves in the immensity of the non-physical world. The Ur would help orient them within what it called the jewelled halls of Deepstone. It would help them fulfil their destiny – and then it would move on. On Earth such an offer would have met with immediate suspicion, but after centuries of harmony the Paligar did not distrust without evidence.

The nomination and vetting process took almost five years, for these two minds would serve as the very soul of Paligar. After a general plebiscite, two candidates emerged as the clear people's choice. Asa and Amirik were both esteemed political philosophers and poets. Married for over fifty years, both had at one time served as chair of the Grey Conclave. Both were well advanced in years, Amirik in particular had begun a slow spiral of a terminal illness beyond Paligar's ability to treat. Even through great pain, he endeavoured still to serve his homeworld and surely this was the worthy candidate Paligar sought. Asa, though not so close to death, claimed she could not imagine hesitating at any threshold through which Amirik could step. If eternal service of Paligar was the price for eternity with her other half, then so be it. Amirik and Asa, Duty and Love, if Deepstone was to be guided by Paligar principles, then surely these must be those principles.

And so, in an elaborate sacred ceremony without precedent, Asa and Amirik stepped together into the Chamber of the Ascension where they were ushered from their bodies and their consciousness released to planar space.

The Ur awaited.

The Golden Age

In the first days, this celebrated achievement seemed a font of benefit for Paligar. Asa and Amirik spoke through Deepstone to the Grey Conclave each day with such elegance and preternatural subtlety of thought that many questioned the need for the Conclave at all. The pair had solutions for problems Paligar had been unable to solve for centuries, their every recommendation seemed to result in immediate and lasting prosperity. Against this tide of success, it was inevitable that a vote was called as to whether the position of chair should be eliminated and control of the Conclave ceded to Asa and Amirik in perpetuity.

The vote passed, though not without opposition.

Upon hearing the will of the Council, Asa spoke from Deepstone of the unrivalled honour that had already been bestowed upon her and Amirik. Once more she recited the vows she and Amirik had spoken on the day of their ascension. Amirik was silent that day.

Months later, the Chamber of the Ascension – the single greatest technical achievement of the Paligar people – was dismantled by order of the Grey Conclave and its key components rendered forever inoperable, for no one race could attempt to populate planar space without drawing unwanted attention and repercussions from extra-planar forces that existed, forces entirely without reason or mercy. This at least was the explanation given by Amirik.

Soon thereafter, the Grey Conclave became known as the Council of the Ascended, and those living Paligar who served upon it held little more than ceremonial positions. When, one after another, they stepped down, they were not replaced. The Council of the Ascended was a council of two, though many wondered at the ongoing role of the Ur, which the caretakers warned still lurked within Deepstone, long after it claimed it would leave.

Without the council Asa and Amirik now projected themselves directly over the planetary communication network, sometimes to individuals, sometimes to the entirety of the populace. They would appear together as ghostly apparitions always holding hands and dressed in the robes they'd worn during the ascension ceremony years before. Occasionally when they appeared, people would claim to hear a distant susurration, some tendril of words uncomprehended and yet somehow unsettling.

Prosperity had continued, but many of the Paligar grew uneasy. They were enjoying the ride, but many were less and less sure they still knew who was driving.

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The Grim Decline

As the years passed, Asa and Amirik, once responsive and compassionate, grew increasingly distant and evasive when pressed on certain subjects. An edict of 'renewed scientific focus' from the Council had actually stifled most scientific enquiry, and the 'need to protect our most treasured home' had seen the custodian class shut out of the planetary ecological infrastructure. Deepstone itself was now off limits and guarded by armed autonomous machines never before seen on Paligar.

The Council warned of dark times ahead, of subversive elements planning to undo the progress of the past two hundred years. Planning, they claimed, to cripple Deepstone and expel what they imagined as undue alien influence. Without Deepstone, Amirik warned, the burden of Paligar's population would overwhelm the ecosystem, and collapse would be all but unavoidable.

By this justification, the Council re-established and armed the centuries-defunct quasi-religious order known as the Children of Paligar. Their first act was to take control of the world-wide media grid. Their second to arrest 'dissidents' and those 'inclined to become dissident'.

Several prominent citizens who'd known Asa and Amirik in life started to publicly question whether the two still existed at all, or whether their ascension had been a ploy by the Ur to wrest control of Paligar. Some speculated that the Ur itself was nothing more than a persona crafted by Deepstone to mask a dark consciousness that had sprung to life despite the best safeguards of its architects.

Whatever the truth, they warned that Paligar was firmly under the control of beings whose motives were unknown and who answered to no-one. Shortly after they were arrested and publicly executed.

The First Resistance

The clear removal of public voices galvanised the need for action. One of the two southern continents erupted in open rebellion, civilians with ad hoc weapons fighting the Children of Paligar for control of the streets. Through hacked broadcasts they proclaimed their intention to seize control of Deepstone and make Amirik and Asa answer for their crimes and, above all, make the Ur leave.

Then the unthinkable occurred. For the first time in centuries, drought struck. The continent's crops began to fail, supply routing collapsed, and famine followed almost immediately. It was reported by media that this disaster came as a result of crippling, ill-advised attacks on key monitoring and climate-control installations across the continent. Security around the installations would be increased while repairs were attempted, but it was suggested that it might be years before the southern continent's ecological equilibrium could be restored.

The truth, however, was clear to the ecological custodians who had once administered the system. These droughts were being actively generated and maintained by the installations of the southern continent. This was but a taste of the true power wielded by the Council of the Ascended, and a clear measure of what they were capable of.

Over the next three decades, there was no open rebellion. The deteriorating death spiral of the southern continent was allowed to play out in agonizing detail over the media. Key species were lost, and there was mass immigration that, in turn, strained the careful balance of the other continents and, according to the media, put further strain on the ability of Deepstone to maintain balance. The story inexorably shifted away from projected recovery time for the southern continent and toward limiting the ecological damage to the rest of the planet – and, of course, to what terrorism had cost Paligar.

Organized resistance continued, but it had to be careful. The agents of the Children of Paligar were everywhere, and the mood of the public, especially the younger generation, had shifted to one of grim acceptance and even tacit support for the Council of the Ascended that professed to keep them safe. This support even extended to the Ur – now generally considered an adjunct to the Council, assisting in restoring balance to a world thrown into chaos and teetering on the brink of collapse.

Though many small resistance forces existed, all with their own agenda, the most significant was Outthink, or O-Cell. O-Cell was the lightning rod for the disenfranchised thinkers, the scientists and custodians, all outcast and suppressed by the Council.

Their goal was not to destroy Deepstone and the increasingly integrated communication networks associated with it. Although the consensus was that this would rout the ascended, and perhaps even destroy them outright, too many other consequences could not be foreseen. Could Paligar survive the wholesale loss of its climate control infrastructure? What if the

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installations were now rigged to destroy the planet if Deepstone were taken offline?

They wondered too at the effects on the Children of Paligar. Now in the tens of millions, it seemed these individuals might not be the willing volunteers originally thought. The recovery of the circlets they wore revealed that it allowed them to communicate with – or at the very least receive communications from – the ascended directly. Could these individuals survive the destruction of that network? Could the network even be truly destroyed without individually disabling every circlet.

Even apart from these unknowns, a planetary assault seemed impossible. Too many sites would need to be hit almost simultaneously to effectively disrupt the networks, and the ranks of the resistance were too thin. No, a planetary assault was impossible; therefore, a bolder plan was put into effect, one which took another forty years to bring to fruition.

The Twenty-Eight Martyrs

While less patient resistance cells launched sporadic and ill-fated attacks, O-Cell retreated to a bunker deep in the wastelands of the southern continent. There they worked tirelessly to recreate the Ascension Technology. Paligar had done it before, some of O-Cell had even worked on the project, that meant they could do it again.

And so it was, close to a hundred years after Asa and Amirik first bid farewell to the physical reality of the world they both loved, that twenty-eight rebels were loaded into specially prepared pods. With no more ceremony than a recapped mission briefing, they were ascended and released via a hacked network connection into Deepstone.

It is unclear exactly what happened next, but it was nightmarish. Some of the rebels went mad upon seeing the true form of the Ur for the first time. Others were devoured and torn apart while still trying to understand a realm without true substance. Asa and Amirik watched the Ur gorge itself on these dissidents, screaming incoherencies that might have been denouncement and might have been encouragement. Only one rebel survived more than a few moments, and it was he who turned the tide. Vandion.

Vandion would later claim that he was aware of something that lay even beyond the limitless gulf of planar space. When he ascended, his mind was opened, and he immediately saw the full scope of the horror and knew what had to be done. The Ur was not the only super-entity in the galaxy it seemed, and another had just subtly tipped the scales.

It was Vandion who showed the true form of the Ur and the mad husks of Asa and Amirik to the Children of Paligar via their circlets. Vandion who broadcast images of his fellow rebels as they were devoured. Vandion who then arose from Deepstone, stepped directly into the minds of the Children of Paligar – storing a fragment of his consciousness alongside each of theirs. The Ur could not follow, could not comprehend an entity tethering itself to biology instead of escaping it. It could attack a mortal, but it had no means for overcoming an ascended being's firewalls set in a biological framework.

Beyond its reach, Vandion ordered the Children of Paligar to execute the plan O-cell had long ago dismissed: to destroy all networks on Paligar. His suborned planet-wide army were already in place around the very infrastructure he targeted. The Great Uprooting, as it would come to be known, was a paroxysm of destruction.

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Some Paligar resisted, terrified of the consequences of centuries of work being torn asunder, but they had not been enough to stop the Council, and they were not enough to stop Vandion. Integrated power and transportation grids were crippled, worldwide media and communications networks snuffed out as satellites rained from the skies, falling like embers into the seas of Paligar. Banking and commerce ended overnight. Advanced medical networks went dark, and automated manufacturing plants fell still for the first time in living memory.

And of course, the great planetary engines that watched the skies and swept the ocean currents and birthed the winds and graced the soils with rain – failed. Nothing was spared.

The Trap Closes

Within the Heart of the World, at the installation of Deepstone, Vandion could sense the Ur coiled around the tortured remains of Asa and Amirik, its fury seething. It understood Vandion's endgame immediately, and it calculated a way to break back into the minds of the Children of Paligar within six days. The Great Uprooting would take five. There was nowhere for it to go, inexorably Deepstone closed around it like a fist.

Vandion ordered that the main server be left intact, for he perceived that while its destruction might snuff out what was left of Asa and Amirik, it would not kill the Ur but rather set it adrift once more in planar space from whence it came. This Vandion would not allow.

The entity he had encountered when he ascended had shown him how to trap the Ur, but not how to destroy it. His duty now was to more than just Paligar, it was to the wealth and life and wonder beyond. The Ur was a destroyer of civilisations, and it could never be allowed to do so again.

The Sermon from Ruins

By the end of the fifth day some twenty thousand Paligar lives had been lost, and it was several more days before the Children of Paligar could entreat local governments and work to calm the populace. It was then that Vandion spoke, through his suborned army, of the shape of things to come.

He spoke for over two hours delivering an impassioned address that would come to be known as the Sermon from Ruins. In it, he praised the Children of Paligar, who had so long been tools of oppression, and characterized the Great Uprooting as the single greatest act of mass redemption the planet had ever known, for a great evil had been defeated, one that had poisoned and scarred Paligar almost beyond recognition.

He begged forgiveness for the deaths the Great Uprooting had occasioned and made it clear that if blame were to be borne it was his burden alone to bear. Among the living, reconciliation would need to be swift and total, for the path ahead would be difficult, and if Paligar were to survive, no more blood could be shed.

Then came words that fell like a hammer blow.

> *"That which has been torn apart can never be made whole again. Our world, our wonders, have been overthrown, and though they may remain alive within our hearts for generations to come, they are lost to us and must remain lost. For to reignite even the smallest spark of our former glory would be to release a horror, not just on our world, but upon distant unsuspecting worlds beyond counting.*
>
> *How the Ur came upon Deepstone is not clear, but what is clear is that ours was not the first world it had poisoned, nor would it have been the last. The Ur survives, trapped within Paligar's sacred heart. And there it will remain – must remain – forever, for to release it now would be a doom unimaginable. Though Paligar has tasted its malice, it has not felt its full wrath.*
>
> *I have not the power to destroy the Ur, if such a power even exists. I have not the power to banish it, nor compel it in any way. It cannot be bargained with, it cannot be trusted to honour any pledge, and it is so utterly alien that our perceptions of rationality and benevolence are meaningless to it. It must never go free.*
>
> *Paligar is a fallen world, a world of grief and regret, a world poised now on the brink of ecological ruin. But it is our world. And we will survive here and nurse her back to health. We will adapt and find new ways to live, a new equilibrium will be reached, a new civilisation built."*

Vandion would provisionally release most of the Children of Paligar to serve the regional governments as they restored order and set about managing the

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ecological crisis looming just beyond the horizon. He would not hold any position of power. Would not involve himself in politics. Paligar belonged to the Paligar. He would not be a ruler, only a jailor.

Yet Vandion made it clear he would never allow the restoration or development of any technology that could offer so much as a glimmer of opportunity to the Ur. Any breach of this one commandment would be met with an immediate and unequivocal response.

The New Equilibrium

For a few months, communities pulled together, buoyed by their emancipation from the Council of the Ascended and a sense of common purpose. It didn't last long. Soon the grim implications of their fallen world undermined one urban centre after another.

The weather was erratic; violent storms punished, and in some cases nearly eradicated, coastal communities. Proper distribution of food and goods was almost impossible. Shortages led to hoarding and lawlessness. Malnutrition and outright starvation became problems in many large centres, and without financial markets and banking, brokering solutions between regions was difficult.

Regional governments started to falter as anger and radicalism took over. Martial law was common, and the Children of Paligar were once again spilling blood. Then waves of infectious disease swept the largest most densely populated continent. Medicine was scarce, medical expertise difficult to gain access to, and so the plagues and poxes spread faster than resources could be distributed to address them. When the death toll climbed into the tens of millions, Vandion returned.

Vandion's New Order

The Children of Paligar were reactivated, and Vandion once again spoke through them. His address this time was brief, clarifying that he was assuming command of the Children of Paligar only reluctantly. He would help oversee the establishment of new conventional trade routes, and broker old-fashioned economic and political accords that would stabilize the new realities facing the planet.

But this too proved untenable, for the populace did not want new solutions for a fallen world; they wanted old solutions to the world that Vandion had recklessly ordered destroyed. But on this point, Vandion would not negotiate. No electronic communications networks of any kind would be built. No digital processors. No automated intelligences. Nothing that the Ur might subvert from captivity. Paligar would survive on the wits, will, and mechanical aptitude of its people or not at all.

This enraged the Paligar, and a planet-wide opposition to Vandion began to crystalize.

High-ranking delegates from the Children of Paligar pleaded for the time to implement new solutions and insisted that Vandion alone had seen the Ur firsthand and truly understood what was at stake should it ever escape. They repeatedly cast Vandion as a fervent patriot who had given up his physical form for the faint hope of freeing the planet from the tyranny of the Ascended, knowing full well that it might mean his life. No decision, they said, had been made lightly. He was the last of the martyrs.

Opposition leaders were unmoved. More Paligar had died from the Great Uprooting, they pointed out, than had perished in a century of Ascended tyranny. Vandion they claimed, having surrendered his body, was already fundamentally inured to the suffering his high-minded ideals had wrought. Vandion was bloodless and disconnected and thinking, by his own admission, of distant worlds beyond counting. The people of Paligar, by contrast, were thinking of their very survival and the survival of their children and loved ones. The Paligar were watching their planet die around them, and Paligar belonged to the Paligar. Or was that no longer true? Granted, Vandion was once perhaps a great many things – scientist, patriot, hero, revolutionary, liberator – but like Asa and Amarik, now he was a tyrant. He believed, as all tyrants do, that his will alone superseded the collective will of those suffering beneath him.

They demanded that Vandion compromise and allow some of the more rudimentary emergency networks to be re-established. Demanded that they be allowed to address the suffering of Paligar with tools once available to them. Vandion could guide them and monitor progress and police results for signs of danger, but he could not doom an entire race to suffering and deprivation.

Instead, Vandion offered an unexpected alternative.

The Great Ships

Vandion revealed that, at the time of its overthrow, the Ur had been secretly constructing three massive starships. The Ur, as Vandion had asserted, had always had its eye on more worlds than just Paligar.

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So Vandion offered the people of Paligar a choice. The technological freedom of starting a new home elsewhere, or the nobility of saving their sacred homeworld. The choice presented wasn't one that needed to be made immediately.

At the time of the Great Uprooting the ships were almost complete, but it was an 'almost' that would be very difficult to bridge without resorting to forbidden technologies. Everyone must be prepared also, for failure, for the engines, navigation systems, and *especially* the planar drive dare not be tested until the moment of their use.

To the people of Paligar, the risks were unimportant. Whether they truly planned to join the exodus or not, the project to complete the vessels gave the Paligar a focus. For decades, it was the news everyone wanted to hear, and hardcopy photos of the ships' progress were hotly traded items. Those able to do so would travel for months just to see, or better still to work on, the great ships.

Equilibrium

For Vandion, the project bought time as Paligar inched back from the precipice. The Children of Paligar – who, thanks to their circlets, formed the only network on the planet – reinvented themselves as the Preservers. Their stabilizing influence was felt in every level of government, and they had a hand in every enterprise of any importance. Thanks to their real-time networking they were able to locate new lands rendered fertile by the same ecological shift that rendered others desert. They were able to reform regional governments, mediate disputes, and kick-start trade caravans. Diaspora was encouraged to relieve the pressure on cities, and small villages and towns soon dotted the landscape.

By the time the ships were complete, it had been almost seventy years since the defeat of the Council. The question of who would go, and who would stay, was posed again. Still there were many more who wanted exodus than would fit on the ships, but where once they had been millions, they were now just hundreds of thousands.

The Calino Exodus

Of those who wanted to depart, seventy-two thousand were chosen – the most that could be sustained on their long journey. As is the way of Paligar, it was the best and brightest minds who were chosen for the exodus. At their disposal would be materials required to start a thriving colony: seeds and genetic material from thousands of Paligar species, detailed plans for climate control facilities, and indeed, the entire body of Paligar science and learning including all the banned science literature collected and held by the Preservers.

It took almost another year to fully load and prepare the ships. Then, as rare motion-picture cameras filmed, the *Martyr*, the *Scion*, and the *New Hope* lumbered into the sky, their massive boosters scorching the plain for kilometres in every direction. Crewed entirely by the Preservers, they were guided out of Paligar's gravity well by Vandion himself.

At a distance of approximately five thousand kilometres, ten Preservers on each of the three ships donned helmets that linked their circlets into the planar jump engines. Vandion's last act of control was to set the course and activate the planar-shift engines.

Forty-seven hours later, all three ships emerged, and automated systems kicked in for the first time, confirming their location and transmitting navigational data to the pilots and crew. All thirty Preservers whose minds had actuated the jump engines, however, were dead.

The ships would travel for months before finally arriving at temporary orbits around their new home, Calino. The crew of all three ships removed their circlets – sacred artefacts handed down to them from the ranks of the fallen and departed – and destroyed them.

The Preservers, were bound by a secret the full scope of which would not become known to the colonists for many years. The Great Paligar Archive (for which they would serve as archivists) while astounding and precious beyond measure, was incomplete. It contained no instructions for the creation of planar-shift engines, the physics of planar space, nor the science of ascension. History texts ended prior to the discovery of the Ur. And finally, the true relative position of Paligar and Calino was nowhere to be found. Succeed or fail, return was impossible now.

On Paligar, a planet now soothed by the distant glimmer of promise and stripped of its brightest most intuitive scientists, Vandion and the Preservers took gradual – but inexorable – control of government, providing sound leadership and a framework of faith and spirituality for centuries to come.

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THE CONTENTIOUS SIDE OF CYBERNETICS

A Hulgari Account of Humanities Cybernetic Secret

As with any great technology, the history of cybernetic augmentation has not been without its speedbumps. Certainly everyone talks about Tencom and Incarnadine's joint release of the Olympian range of Cybernetics in 2120 and of athlete Flynn Voss' decision to get cybernetics (then considered a prosthetic) despite no injury.

But what few seem to remember is that the explosion of tech start-ups afterwards happened because the patents Tencom and Incarnadine held for DNI based augmentation were overturned by the Empire in 2121. More importantly they were overturned for good reason.

By the end of 2120 the Hansei government, and a few less savory conglomerates who shall remain unnamed, were already negotiating with Tencom about augmentation as a political tool. If cybernetics could make the weak strong, they reasoned it should be those who put humanities interests first that grew strongest.

This belief that 'we invented it so we can use it to any end without consequence' is so ingrained in human nature that even the huge compensation payments from the Empire did not sooth the heated objections. For a time humanity threatened withdrawing from the Empire (basically a threat of civil war, there being no legal recourse for withdrawal in the Imperial Subject Agreement).

Fortunately humanities crusade against this perceived injustice did not gain much traction with the other members of the Empire. Even some of the biggest supporters of the Chugi-Ni initiative saw this as a betrayal of the ideals humanity had promised to adopt when they were lifted from Earth. Realising they had drastically misread the political climate, the Hansei Legislature shifted stance. With (I suspect) the help of Neko Neko Media they crafted a beautiful story about treading too close to old habits and they thanked the galactic community for its stern insistence that 'we regain our better selves'. This shift in attitudes is why the Emprie's decision to overturn the patents, though not secret, is not widely remembered or discussed.

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DIGITAL CONSCIOUSNESS TRANSFER

Project WSP-3R

For a thousand years, the Ur and its allies lay trapped, but in an evolving galaxy, Paligar could not stay hidden forever. In 2138, twenty years after the success of the DNI, Tencom had just moved to Mannheim and was looking for its next big break. Though their success with the technology which redefined the twenty-second century had made them astoundingly rich, a flood of small innovative competitors were now pressuring their market share. A Tencom executive named Grant Tamura was given charge of the new Pure Research Division with a mandate to find and fund the next epochal technology.

Perhaps the most unlikely of the projects he funded, was an effort to digitise a human consciousness. Human science fiction had long been fascinated with the idea of a human mind, transcended from the limitations of a human body. Such a being would be immortal, and its intellectual capabilities would be limited only by the hardware it could obtain. The proposal for the project had no clear pathways, but it was authored by Doctor Fumiko Orikasa, one of the leading minds behind DNI-controlled vehicles, and it had attracted the attention of Averyn Princess Olicia val Skye, heir apparent to the Verdant Crest's Imperial duke. While Tamura gave the project even odds of success, the opportunity to build relationships between the company and the future Sector Duchess seemed worthwhile in itself.

The project was given an enviable budget, an experienced surgeon, and a renowned cyberneticist. Asur val Kosmar, the Averyn widely regarded as the finest of the Whiteblade samurai, was assigned to the team as Olicia's personal guard, and a collection of criminals serving multiple life sentences were even extradited into arcology custody where no laws could prevent them from being used as unwilling human trials.

Orikasa's project was given the serial code WSP-3R, but the team would come to refer to it simply as 'Project Whisper'.

Initial Experiments

Between 2138 and 2140, Orikasa's team developed equipment for replicating neural synapses onto the same crystal matrix architectures found in the

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ANI systems used commercially and by the military. Numerous animal trials were attempted, but the team were trying to solve two problems at once. While DNIs had been extensively developed for humans and aliens, no real ground had been made on linking animals to such a system (the Ootori Syndicate was working separately to solve this very problem). For Orikasa's team, it was unclear whether their experiments were failing because of the technology, or because of the test animals' inability to communicate with it.

It was during these compiling months of failure that Asur began to see something he had not expected. Though his training hid it, he had become bored with his young charge who, though charismatic and intelligent, approached the project like a sponge, absorbing everything but providing little input of her own. With time, he realised that this Averyn, considered remarkable even among her own people, had become almost infatuated with Doctor Orikasa. When he pondered why, the Whiteblade felt himself falling into the same trap. To his eyes, Orikasa had the soul of a samurai – she was brilliant and motivated, fearless even in the face of defeat. When Asur made his interest known, it was reciprocated, if tentatively at first.

The Collector

In late 2140, Orikasa decided to attempt a single human trial, if only to establish to what extent they were limited by their subjects, rather than their equipment. The team argued at length, with the project's surgeon, Doctor Kevin Ronso, particularly opposed to the idea. Ultimately, they selected the worst of their test subjects, a man who murdered numerous individuals to harvest their augments and sell them on the black market under the name 'the Collector'.

The collector was tied down, his mind linked to a crystal matrix rendered indistinguishable from organic neurons by a trick of the team's custom wetware bridge. His organic brain cells were then slowly rendered inert by a fine beam of radiation, and the brain attempted to replicate its functions onto 'healthy' cells. With nowhere else to go, the brain ultimately remapped itself onto the crystal matrix, and when the tense process was finally complete, Orikasa's screens showed a rough representation of the Collector's previous brain scan, complete with the flashes and flares of activity – a scan *not* of his organic mind but of the virtual brain stored on an isolated server. The first ever organic to digital mind transfer was successful.

But the moment they disconnected the wetware, the digitised consciousness became inert – raw data with no self-evolution. The team was stumped, for a moment they'd held a living digital mind in the palm of their hands only to have it die when it was disconnected from a body it was no longer associated with.

The Paligar Connection

Following the Collector experiment, Olicia val Skye finally made her mark on the project. Over the last two years, she'd detailed several Imperial agents to search the breadth of the Empire for anything that might assist the project. One such agent had come across an anthropological expedition to Paligar and several pages from a book called *In Defiance of the Martyr*. Those pages described the digitisation of an ancient hero, though they stopped before a full explanation of the means could begin.

While there was at least a chance the story was fictional, Tamura had given strict instructions that Orikasa pursue any leads from the princess to full reasonable extent. By early 2141, the team had relocated their operations to Paligar, sharing a prefabricated outpost with the anthropological team.

Vandion's Dilemma

By this time, Vandion's regime had survived for centuries, hobbling progress towards the information era as best it could. Their technology had become strangely disjoint, as viewed by the Empire. They had massive solar magnifiers that drove steam boilers, yet not a spark of electricity to be seen. Advanced flywheel energy storage systems powered huge trains and elegant cars, but their homes were lit by candles or lanterns. They had massive mechanical calculation engines but printed out results onto paper. There were no TVs, no display screens of any kind, and without radio or even telegraph, messages were still couriered by hand. For every city-state pikeman or musketman, the Church of the Martyr had two, and they tirelessly policed labs and libraries and machines for any sign of heresy.

The discovery of this strange land by intelligent explorers was not unforeseen, but Vandion's hope was that they would either be ignored, or at worst, simply destroyed and the memory of Deepstone lost forever. He had not predicted the emergence of a vast star-spanning empire that, on discovering Paligar, would soon notify the Calino.

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Though the Calino expedition was small (the distances were great) the Paligar were immediately fascinated. Vandion contacted the Calino through Preserver Silas, one of the Children of Paligar, and insisted they move their base camp to a more remote location and minimise contact with the populace. The Calino complied, but the damage was already done, and the resistance movements that had chafed under the Martyr's theocracy were energised by efforts to control access to these mysterious off-worlders who seemed to confirm some of the oldest forbidden stories.

By the time Orikasa's team arrived, Vandion had resolved to freely share the public version of Paligar's history, one that held no mention of the dark times of the Ur. He hoped that by openly providing such information he could prevent any expeditions into the cities or, in particular, attempts to access Deepstone.

Project Whisper on Paligar

From the moment they arrived, Orikasa's team were unwelcome. The Calino anthropologists were disgusted at the idea of a human team trampling their history and Preserver Silas flatly dismissed *In Defiance of the Martyr* as a fiction written to excite the masses.

The team's cyberneticist, Doctor Kal Effinson, had not been convinced that the text was real until he saw Silas deny it. He had pursued his previous projects through some questionable means, and he had seen, and circumvented, countless individuals 'protecting the truth'. He decided to take matters into his own hands, slipping away from the outpost to visit one of the cities.

Staying undetected was impossible, but he wasn't trying to be undetected, he was just trying to make sure he was found by the resistance before the city guard. No one in the town watch was in a hurry to confront an alien, not when it was so unclear what the allowed outcomes of such a confrontation might be. While the guards were consulting their command chain, the rebels acted, and Doctor Effinson was ferreted away to a safe house.

That night, Effinson met with Jeveroth, the highest-ranking rebel leader his hosts could produce at short notice. The cyberneticist asked for a full copy of *In Defiance of the Martyr* and offered to trade in the currency of rebels everywhere – weapons. He didn't have a lot to trade – just what he could discretely remove from the small arms locker at the outpost – but on balance his hosts didn't have much either. The only full copy of the book they knew of was in a library hidden at the top of the sacred mountain Kareshmir. The rebellion kept the text alive through decentralisation. Individual pages were copied at every opportunity and spread through as many hands as possible. Ultimately Effinson traded the weapons he carried for as many pages as he could, returning to the outpost with a folder of disparate sheets, well short of a full book.

The Battle of Kareshmir

Orikasa accepted the pages without condemnation, if Tencom succeeded in creating digital immortality, even the Calino would soon forget a few pulse pistols handed out to a pre-spaceflight civilisation.

For days, the team studied the pages, taking care to keep their existence secret from both the Calino and Preserver Silas. They made significant updates to their equipment, but the quality of the work, particularly its most technical aspects, had clearly degraded through successive copying. Orikasa decided that, before they returned to Mannheim to attempt another human trial, they would go to the temple at the top of the mountain and negotiate for a copy of the text.

They did not expect it to be easy, but the documents they'd recovered told them little of use about the mountain, and they'd taken to assuming the various consciousnesses digitised by the Paligar could not have survived in the society they saw now. Perhaps most critically, the pages did not cover at all the origin of the Ur, or its ultimate fate and that of Asa and Amirik. As Orikasa's team understood it, the Paligar had digitised numerous consciousnesses and those entities had gone to war with one another, leading to civil collapse and, ironically, their own mutual destruction.

Halfway up mount Kareshmir, Orikasa's team were assaulted by a force of church soldiers. There were no questions, no accusations, just a barrage of musket fire and a cavalry charge. The science team were largely unprepared, most were not even armed, and the battle became a desperate scramble for survival. Asur was the one exception, an advanced race imbued with advanced technology and the finest weapons of the Empire he was able to blunt entire charges by himself. Had he travelled alone he would have been an all but impossible target for the Paligar. But he did not travel alone, and the more the church soldiers closed in on the research party, the more he gravitated to Orikasa's side, the more he protected her over the others.

As often happens there was a moments lull in the fighting and Asur glanced between the shoulders of

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two temple guards to see Olicia val Skye looking back at him. Unarmed she'd fallen back on the claws and raw strength her people haven't used for war in centuries. About her feet were the bodies of maimed and torn guardsmen, her hands coated in blood to the forearms and her young eyes haunted with horror and betrayal.

She opened her mouth to speak, but what words she may have said were lost forever as a Paligar spear pierced her neck from behind. Her shriek of agony gurgled out as soon as it began and though Asur immediately dispatched her attacker the damage was done.

The Banshee

Orikasa's team might never have escaped from that mountain, but a force of rebels, led by Jeveroth, broke them out and rushed them back to the outpost. The

TETE-A-TETE INTERNAL MAIL SERVER

[Mannheim Arcology Archive A38506 – Email 4248]
To: Fumiko Orikasa
From: Olicia val Skye

Good morning Doctor,

I hope you will forgive my lack of decorum in your office this morning. I fear my insistence may have indicated disrespect rather than the excitement and certainty I felt. I really do believe that I have found something that will get us past the failure with the Collector.

I've attached the survey records for Paligar, there's a pre-transistor society there being investigated by an expedition from SLC [Acronym Finder: "Sapient Learning Centre:" a Calino university with campuses across five worlds]. The Calino think the Paligar used to be a lot more advanced.

Also attached are scans of a Paligar text that refers to ascending three of their ancients and the illustrations look a lot like our own experiments. It's surprisingly detailed and there's clearly an element we didn't include. The translation is a bit sketchy on this, but it looks like they linked the machine to planar space.

My supposition is that the mind, or perhaps the soul, needs a place to go, or maybe to draw energy from, in order to remain active?

I *really* think we should check this out.
- Olicia val Skye

AWETECH-0

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Calino were aghast as the rebels arrested Silas and entrenched around the facility.

If Olicia had been human she would have been dead, but the Averyn are robust and tenacious. Even still, she was dying and beyond the reach of conventional medicine. Desperate to prevent the inevitable, Orikasa had the princess brought to the Digital Consciousness Transfer equipment. The team moved quickly and began the transfer, but just as they started Olicia suddenly woke up, screaming and thrashing as best she could with a breathing tube, torn throat and restrained limbs. Her voice, unable to leave her mouth came out clear through her augments, shrieking out her pain across the wireless as the group continue to work.

Despite their fatigue and desperation, it was the cleanest transfer the team would ever perform. Even with their best efforts Olicia did not survive; mid-procedure she fell suddenly silent, the medical scanners showing flat on all life signs. The team continued with the transfer, but they already knew what the result would be.

Data. Data with more peaks than normal, but an inert digital record was no substitute, no preservation, of the friend and colleague who died in their midst.

Breaking the Mountain

Tragedy has a way of bringing people together and in their grief the team was galvanised. None more so than Orikasa and Asur, each responsible, in their own way, for the protection of the Imperial Princess. Each responsible, in their own way, for her death.

Here they faced a decision, return to Mannheim having done the unthinkable, or find a way to make the loss worth it. Framed as such, of course, the question became rhetorical. Neither had a history of accepting failure, neither had a history of giving up. Effinson and Ronso were told of their plan, but no others. Everything that had happened might be forgiven, written off as negligence, or counted as the regrettable cost of a greater goal, but to knowingly go further… was unthinkable.

They openly rounded up every weapon they could find and gave them to Jeveroth. Some of the Calino resisted, of course, but they were disabled by Asur and Effinson. Jeveroth took his newly armed rebels and led an assault on the base of the sacred mountain, timed with a general uprising in the city. With the church soldiers distracted, Orikasa, Asur, Effinson and Ronso took a LEVV to the entrance at the top of the mountain.

There were a few guards here, as well as some defence systems that predated the technological dark age, but Orikasa's team were now expecting a fight, and led by Asur, they overcame Vandion's defences easily enough.

Within the chambers of Kareshmir, they found a vast library where velum and leather books sat shoulder to shoulder with discs and data crystals. In a strange inversion of technology, the more advanced media were also, by far, the oldest. Pressed for time they quickly worked out the indexing system and located a complete copy of *In Defiance of the Martyr*.

But their search also uncovered a room *beyond* the library where three great server access points were stylised out of carved stone sarcophagi. The room was covered in warnings, but so was the library, and the team's logical conclusion was that they'd found the database where all the library's physical information was conveniently stored in a digital format. Orikasa directed Kal to plug in and take a data dump.

Something changed as Kal began his download. It started with his laptop – the screen blanked, the firewalls destroyed, and the OS rewritten. A moment later the wireless indicator light blinked on the side.

At first it sounded like the most distant of wind, then it evolved into a gentle susurration of voices, words at once unmistakable and unidentifiable drifted out of the wireless. This new signal invited curiosity, invoked it, but the harder they listened, the less the team understood, the less they could comprehend.

One by one, the scientists drifted back to the vault room and linked their wireless systems to the other two servers, prying open ancient locks and seals. Floating over them was the faint glowing visage of Amirik.

A moment later the glowing Paligar was joined by Asa – and that was when Vandion arrived.

His cry of dismay cascaded both through the material world and over the wireless as he stormed into the room.

The second he arrived, Asur moved, crossing the room with the distinctive blur of the ginbushi, only to freeze with his sword millimetres from the Paligar's throat. His eyes, his will, glazed over beneath a battle of the Paligar Ascendants.

Vandion had grown strong over the centuries his colleagues spent in confinement, and before long he was able to free each of the members of Orikasa's

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team from the thrall of the Whisper and protect them from its insidious call.

Asa and Amirik turned their gaze upon Vandion and attacked him directly through the wireless. No worldly ramification accompanied such silent assault, but to Orikasa's augmented team, there was a sense akin to placing one's hand on a pipe filled with rushing water. Like that, but so much greater, like razor wire under impossible tension, vibrating along its length as the forces continued to pull upon it, threatening at any moment the inevitable twang followed by the rending of every mind in the room. It was clearly time to go.

The Ur Unleashed

Orikasa and Asur had already moved to the door, and Ronso was crossing the room when he realised that Effinson wasn't with him. Effinson had seen the scale and power of Deepstone, and it had tempted him in a way entirely separate to the Whisper. By itself it would never have been enough, but it was a wedge the Ur could use to drive open his mind despite the firewalls Vandion had created.

Ronso tried to stop his colleague from reconnecting to the server, but Effinson was powerfully augmented, and the surgeons attempts to stop him were as a child's.

The Ur was released, and the team beheld its wireless representation for the first time. A thing of many, of carapace and feather and greasy skin, of long-fingered dozen-taloned hands. Of three heads with three different shapes, of too few necks and too much body, of mouths fanged and mouths toothless and of many more eyes than any being could want for. Then it changed again and everything they'd have described it with perished beneath new heads and new eyes and new mouths and on it went, its parts shifting like oil on the surface of water.

What happened next, happened very quickly; Effinson levelled his pistol on Vandion and fired, but not before Ronso got his shield-generating augment between them. Both just spectators in their own bodies, they grappled for a moment and then Effinson got his hands in place and tore his opponent's shield-arm from its socket.

Vandion cried for them to leave. The battle for the wireless had intensified, it literally crackled, errant code signals striking the science teams firewalls like debris from an erupting volcano. Completely defensive against three aspects, Vandion surrendered control over Ronso, but the man recognised the Whisper's madness had not left Effinson. Even injured, he desperately launched himself at the other.

It was, at best, a delaying action but it was enough to see Asur cross the room. Vandion was meaningless to him, but if he didn't intervene it was clear Ronso would die. The ginbushi acted immediately, cutting Effinson down and half-dragging Ronso from the room.

Flight to Mannheim

By the time the survivors' LEVV arrived back at the outpost, it was in disarray. Augmented had gone berserk, fighting each other, fighting the disconnected and even attacking the Paligar still protecting the facility. Orikasa's team abandoned their equipment and fled to their ship, not stopping until they'd escaped into planar space.

They did not know it yet, but they'd brought a sliver of the Whisper with them – from Deepstone to Effinson's laptop to the LEVV and ultimately to their ship. Its escape was tenuous, so it stayed silent, days upon days passed until finally it reached Mannheim and found a network beyond its wildest dreams. Wireless signals spanning cities and worlds and even star systems. Where the circlets had made communicating with minds laborious, the DNIs expertly translated the Whisper's power into the necessary neural signals.

The Shatter, that initial scream that killed so many, was not the Ur's intention. Its error may have come from starvation, or perhaps simply frustration at having been imprisoned for so long. Perhaps it simply misjudged how much throughput the DNIs could take before the side effects became lethal. Regardless the greatest mass-murder in Imperial history was not supposed to happen.

Now significantly refreshed, but also aware that its first act of freedom could have rendered itself trapped once more, the Whisper set about propagating itself with greater care amongst the teaming minds of the survivors.

Rise of the Whisper

Once it had established a foothold on Mannheim, the Ur was able to provide a bridge through planar space for Asa and Amirik to follow. When they came they brought with them the Collector and Olicia. Revived from inert data these two weren't real aspects, they couldn't evolve in the way that Asa and Amirik could, but they would serve as high-level lieutenants.

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The Collector proved magnificent, trying to defeat the Whisper by removing augmentations and yet succeeding mainly in instilling tremendous terror in the survivors. Olicia was less useful, she had died in the midst of the digital transfer, and her programming perpetually relived cycles of betrayal, pain, and rage. The banshees she created were effective certainly, but given free leash, Olicia would have used them to depopulate the galaxy and that was hardly the Whisper's objective.

But she was not without use. Orikasa's ascension process had been very close to functional by the time it was used on the Princess. Olicia was not like the Whisper, but she had a psychic imprint that made her more than a program. It meant the Whisper could feed on the psychic energy given off by her emotional extremes. To maximise this effect, they seized Tencom's Deep Planar Array, an installation intended to act as a telescope into planar space. With some modifications, they made it into a prison for Olicia that would broadcast her suffering directly to planar space where the true 'bodies' of the Whisper reside.

All this took place in a few short weeks, all the while the Whisper was spreading throughout the planar space network from one planet to another. The Whisper did not believe this was enough time for humanity to research and develop any effective countermeasure. It was correct, but it hadn't realised that humanity had *already* developed an effective countermeasure.

The Orikasa Ascension

Throughout the trip back to Mannheim, Orikasa had been working. With a full copy of *In Defiance of the Martyr* she knew in lurid detail what her team had unleashed back on Paligar and how vulnerable the entire Empire was to it. She reasoned the Whisper could not be contained on Paligar forever, sooner or later the Calino would go looking for their expedition, and she doubted Vandion would still be around to help them escape.

So Orikasa improved on her designs for the Digital Consciousness Transfer, incorporating everything she had learned from the Paligar and any improvements she could build upon it from her own expertise. She would need more than test subjects, she would need to assemble an army of ascended beings to lead the return to Paligar and destroy the Ur and its allies.

Since the truth could only curtail her movements when she needed the freedom to act, Orikasa's report to Tamura, head of the Pure Research Division, was largely fictional. Olicia and Effinson would be following on a separate ship with their equipment. They'd uncovered evidence that the Paligar had achieved digital consciousness transfer and she would be immediately incorporating that into her equipment for another human trial. Tamura couldn't have been happier.

When the Shatter took place, Orikasa knew with sickening certainty what had happened. She hadn't escaped Paligar cleanly – there would be no time to build an army, the Whisper was here, now. She dared not ascend any of her test subjects lest she replace the Whisper with something even worse. She considered many options before admitting to herself that there was only ever one choice that she'd be satisfied with. She called in a final favour from Ronso and had him lead the team that Ascended her.

Opposing the Whisper

Orikasa and Asur led the only credible resistance against the Whisper in those early days. The Whisper had not expected humanity to be able to ascend a being so quickly, or for the ascended entity to grasp its powers so immediately. Orikasa had numerous advantages in this, from her study of those who came before, to her own speciality in neuro-cybernetic interfacing.

What followed was a race to claim Imperial Fleet assets before the Whisper took notice. Key to Orikasa's success was the presence of one of the two sector flagships, the *Rustung der Kostenlos*' in orbit over Mannheim. Asur and Orikasa were able to lift the digital siege on the ship and its battlegroup. Not only did this give their fleet a solid core, it also won over Admiral Harkon and Shōgun Sora, two of the most senior military figures in the sector.

With their influence, and Orikasa's ability to inoculate starships against the Whisper, this fragment of the sector fleet was able to swiftly grow. Before the year

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was out, Orikasa had gathered almost half of the total Verdant Crest sector fleet, including both flagships.

The Great Sequestration

Late in the year, Orikasa discovered the Verdant Crest had been cut adrift from the galaxy in a way incomprehensible to modern physics. Ships and signals attempting to leave the Verdant Crest found themselves curving back on their point of origin without ever consciously turning. No light or signal seemed to come from beyond, and the Crest, it seemed, had come to rest in a universe of its own.

The effect, termed the Great Sequestration, was baffling, and its origin troublingly unclear. It seemed unlikely that the Whisper might have limited itself in this way, had the Averyn done this? *In Defiance of the Martyr* had spoken of a benign planar entity that had assisted Vandion, could it have been responsible?

Whatever the cause, this revelation meant Orikasa couldn't simply stockpile resources forever. So, in early 2142, she challenged a major Whisper fleet group in the Gitelman System.

Battle of Gitelman

The fleet group was more than the Whisper could afford to lose and, sure enough, one of the aspects took charge. Asa did not come to attempt a military victory, but a digital one. She would seize Orikasa's forces out from under her and turn the tide of the battle.

Disaster reigned across the fleet as augmented personnel were swayed to the Whisper and network systems began to act with agenda of their own. Orikasa might not have had the strength to hold onto her fleet against such direct intervention, but what she did have was a plan for destroying an aspect. In the first – and to date the only – instance of involuntary biological tethering she used the *Rustung der Kostenlos*' own wireless infrastructure to bind Asa's full planar form to four ginbushi-turned-ronin. When Asur then slew the ronin, Asa died with them.

The last ronin's body hadn't hit the ground before Amirik and the Ur launched their assault on Orikasa. Against both, she could barely hold her own. It was Amirik who turned the balance, briefly directing every berserker on the *Rustung* to attack Asur. Even the master ginbushi could not last against such a force. When he fell, the Whisper had its edge.

But Orikasa didn't have a history of defeat, of giving up. She held the Whisper off for just long enough to seize control of Shōgun Sora, just long enough for her to fight her way to the bridge and perform the Jin Ritual as only a master can. Her nanites found the embers of life in the Averyn, they mapped the mind and spirit of him, and then flowed back into the human woman, washing away everything that was Shōgun Sora and leaving only the consciousness of Asur.

But still Orikasa retained control and drove the shōgun that is Asur to the escape pods and launched them free. Then, and only then, did she allow her consciousness to be shattered before the attacks of the Whisper.

The Orikasa Fragments

Orikasa had one last gambit. She knew the Whisper and its Paligar ally would destroy her, but she also knew they had never destroyed a human Ascendant before. She chose self-destruction, splitting her consciousness and sending the fragments into electronics from obscure memories. In the act of self-destruction, the Whisper could never possess those memories and so could never guess where the fragments had gone. Assuming it even believed the fragments were a credible threat.

Orikasa hoped that they were. She believed even a single fragment might be enough to protect a few individuals from the Whisper. More importantly she hoped that Asur, in the body of Sora, would realise what she'd done and that he'd search places they'd travelled and find the missing fragments.

It was a plan without much certainty, without much hope, but the only alternative she had was complete surrender.

Orikasa was gone, the fleet scattered and routed, and the Whisper's victory was complete.

At least as far as it knew.

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REVEALING THE HISTORY

While the above events are generally presented chronologically, we recommend that you don't reveal them to your players in that manner. The exact approach you take should depend on what suits your campaign, but the below suggestions might spark some ideas.

Revelation by Vision

There's lots of ways to reveal history, but one opportunity you have when dealing with Orikasa fragments is the use of visions transmitted through the wireless. A bold GM might even allow the players to control members of the science team during the visions, with the caveat that the action will inevitably roll to a certain conclusion – but the players get to determine how they reach that conclusion.

Reveal the Collector Surgery Early

The story of a criminal being given super powers is a common one in our society, and this makes the Collector an excellent candidate for misdirection. Sharing the story of how the Collector was ascended will start your players speculating in wild and interesting directions.

The Death of Olicia

Revealing the science team lost the Imperial Princess, and that this motivated their second trip up the mountain, need not be paired with the exact story of her death. Asur's failure to protect her, and Orikasa's failure to ascend her, are both central to the guilt these two characters now carry. Sora/Asur and Orikasa need not be sympathetic characters, but information like this humanises them and should be revealed at the right time.

The Release of the Whisper

If the players are collecting fragments of Orikasa, this is a good piece to reveal on the second to last fragment and, if possible, have them recover it from around Kareshmir itself (we like to use Ronso's severed cybernetic arm as the vehicle for the fragment). Having the players standing in the place where the end of civilisation began, at the same time as they learn *how* the end of civilisation began provides significant weight.

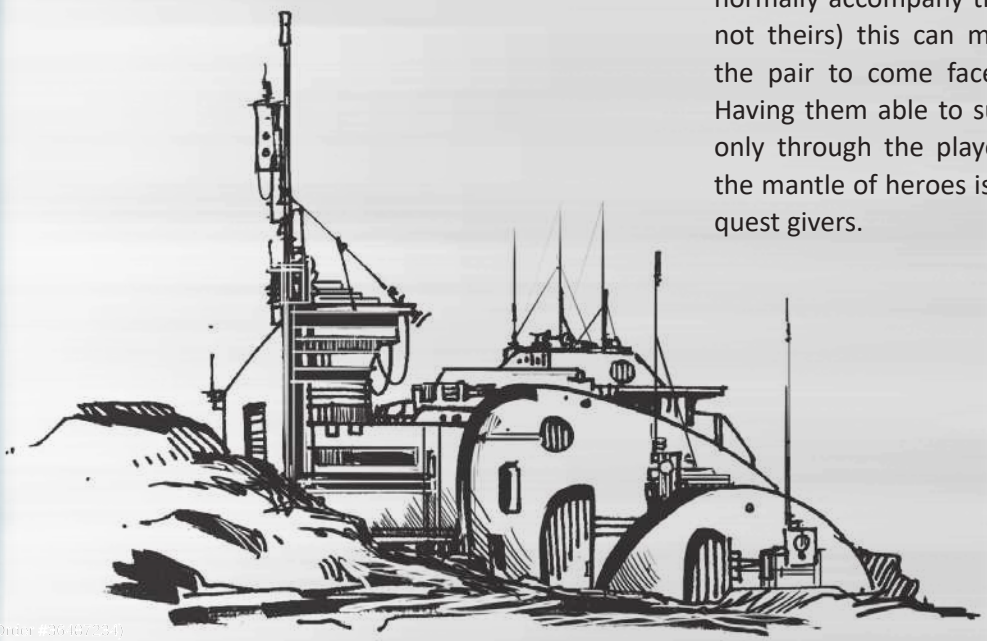
The Ascension and Fragmentation of Orikasa

You might choose to obfuscate what exactly the Orikasa fragments are if your players are collecting them (start by calling them something other than the Orikasa fragments). Certainly, the players should speculate that they're some kind of AI, and some may even jump to the right conclusion fairly early. Be prepared to reveal that the fragments are Orikasa earlier than you want, since many of the people the players are working for may have that information, and the players should occasionally be allowed to throw their weight around.

On the other hand exactly how she came to be shattered – and more specifically that Shōgun Sora is actually Asur – is something almost no-one knows, and the revelation of which has drastic ramifications for the fleet.

Olicia's death and digitisation

If you intend your players to visit the Deep Planar Array, this is an excellent time to reveal this information. Having Olicia reveal it herself as she accuses the players of being pawns to her murderers (Asur and Orikasa) will complicate the idea that 'Olicia is dead and you're just deleting a program'. While Orikasa and Sora should not normally accompany the party (it's the players' story, not theirs) this can make a good exception, forcing the pair to come face to face with their mistakes. Having them able to succeed in such a confrontation only through the players' assistance will help affirm the mantle of heroes is on the players rather than the quest givers.



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TIMELINE OF WIRELESS SOUL TRANSMISSION

THE FALL OF PALIGAR

c. 800	The Ur arrives on Paligar. Asa and Amirik are ascended.
c. 1000	After 200 years of brutal repression the 28 Martyrs are ascended. Vandion seals away the Whisper aspects.
c. 1100	Seventy-two thousand Paligar leave for Calino. It will be the last technological marvel Paligar witnesses for a thousand years.

HANSEI AND THE HULGARI

2036	The Hulgari are discovered by the Averyn.
2038	The Hulgari publicly join the Empire.
2050	Earth is discovered by the Empire and signs the Imperial Subject Agreement in the same year.
2051	Chikyū-Ni begins. Scholars sponsored the initiative travel the Empire on fact-finding missions of unprecedented scale.
2052	Chikyū-Ni scholars survey Hansei and apply for a colony license. Later in the same year the Hulgari attempt to claim jump, founding the colony of Joulan.
2053	Joulan is declared in a state of crisis as a result of famine and disease. Humanity begin settling elsewhere on the planet.
2056	After much debate from the Hulgari, Hansei is passed into human control. The region around the Joulan colony is separated as a self-governing enclave.
2064	Hansei's massive success leads to Empire-wide investment in human colonial projects. Humans disperse across the Verdant Crest and beyond, immigration to Hansei skyrockets.
2078	Hansei's population has hit 2.7 billion, and infrastructure is struggling to keep pace with growth. A huge earthquake kills 200,000 in the city of Edoni on Hansei.
2100	Earth has all but emptied. There are 5 billion humans on Hansei, which is now the second richest world in the Verdant Crest after the Imperial Sector capital.

THE GOLDEN AGE OF CYBERNETICS

2119	Tencom release the "Djinni" Direct Neural Interface.
2120	Incarnadine Medical Engineering, in partnership with Tencom, release the Olympian range of prosthetics and ignite the Golden Age of Cybernetics.
2121	In response to the concerning implications of species-selective cybernetic enhancement, the Imperial Court overturns the basic patents of Tencom and Incarnadine, making DNI and augmentation technology available across the Empire.

DIGITAL CONSCIOUSNESS TRANSFER

2138	Twenty years after the Djinni, DNI adoption rates among the Verdant Crest are at almost 98% with one in four individuals having some form of augmentation. Tencom, still a market leader despite its patent loss, moves its arcology to Mannheim. The new Pure Research Division funds Doctor Fumiko Orikasa's Digital Consciousness Transfer proposal.
2140	The first Digital Consciousness Transfer ends in failure and the death of the criminal known as the Collector. An Imperial Agent provides the team with fragments of *In Defiance of the Martyr*.
2141	Orikasa's team travel to Paligar and ultimately release the Whisper. The Shatter and the Great Sequestration cripple and isolate the Verdant Crest. Fumiko Orikasa is the first successful human Ascension.
2142	Battle of the Gitelman system. Asa is tethered and destroyed, Orikasa escapes destruction by fragmenting.
2146	The last of Orikasa's fleet are at a dead end. On planets everywhere, scavenged supplies are running out, and the Whisper's control seems irrevocable. Brave heroes are needed, catalysts to begin the fires of change.

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THE WHISPER

The term 'Whisper' commonly refers to the signal that emanates over the wireless. The survivors have come to realise that, however alien to them, this signal has a sentience to it. Hence to them, the 'Whisper' is not just a signal, but an entity, most likely an AI or intelligent virus. Analysing the Whisper's code is so dangerous as to render further distinction impossible.

Only those who fought with Orikasa know of the aspects, and even fewer know the names Asa, Amirik and Ur. Even to Orikasa herself, the distinction between the three seems significant only in that the Ur is far more powerful than the others. Whoever Asa and Amirik once were, they have been thralls of the Ur for so long that all independent motivation is entirely subsumed. The signal, the three aspects collectively, all are simply 'the Whisper'.

In truth, the signal and the entities are not one and the same. The consciousness of an aspect resides in planar space and they influence affairs in the real world by propagating their intentions out to communications devices and even physical data storage. The Whisper, the susurration heard on the wireless, is that propagation. Trying to kill the Whisper by attacking its digital code is like trying to kill a person by erasing words they've written on a page.

IS IT OMNIPOTENT? OMNISCIENT?

In terms of awareness, it helps to think of the Whisper on the Wireless as the body of the Whisper and the aspects as its minds. Anytime something happens in the body, the aspects are in some way aware, but each aspect can only directly focus on one thing at a time. For this reason, the Whisper tends to operate on macro scale.

It can very easily and quickly turn a large number of lost into berserkers and send them to attack a facility. On the other hand, guiding a single berserker through a complex maze would require 'hands on' management which would tie up an entire aspect's focus. To avoid getting caught up in complicated micro-tasks, the aspects employ suzerains. These cursed individuals have some of their old psyche left intact, but an objective set by the Whisper is imprinted indelibly over everything.

WHAT DOES IT WANT?

The ultimate goal of the Whisper, and in particular the Ur, can't be understood by us. Indeed, it's probable that even the Whisper grapples with the meaning of its own existence. Certain behaviours are observable, and players are welcome to speculate on the motives behind these.

Emotional Extremes

The Whisper seems to benefit in some way from emotional extremes echoing into the wireless. This is why it has driven civilisation to the limits of survival and is attempting to hold it there. It is also why it allows the arcologies to endure – their 'comparison point' is necessary to prevent the suffering from becoming normalised. It wants struggle and hope and despair, not exhausted surrender.

Procreation

There is a repeating pattern of civilisations discovering the Ur while attempting to digitise a sentient consciousness. Historically the Ur has 'helped them over the line' before turning on them. Eventually it absorbs these digitised consciousnesses, though why it waits, and whether it views them as children, rivals or simply food, is unclear.

Access

The Whisper does not depend on the wireless network for its existence, but it does require it for travel. If all electronics the Whisper is occupying are destroyed, it would still exist, lurking behind the veil of planar space until someone builds an adequate communications receiver in a corresponding 'real world' location once more. Such an event is a massive delay for the Whisper, and even small gaps in electronic communications frustrate it.

Likewise, it relies on sentient beings who are 'networked' for most of its other goals. Generally, the effort involved in 'hooking up more beings' is more trouble than it's worth, but attempts to 'disconnect' a significant section of the population will attract its attention quickly.

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WHERE DID THE UR COME FROM?

The origins of the Ur should be forever unknown to the players. Though it bears broad similarities to a digitised consciousness, that does not mean it should be assumed to have come into being that way. The Ur may have always been, though its means of hunting have no doubt evolved over the years. Regardless, it has no intention of communicating its origins, assuming even it remembers.

WHAT IS THE PLANAR ENTITY OPPOSING THE WHISPER

Twice the Whisper's victims have been indirectly assisted by some powerful being – once during Vandion's Ascension and again in the Great Sequestration. Exactly what this being might be is open to interpretation, certainly something like the Whisper is apt to have made enemies over the millennia.

In lieu of anything else, this entity can be assumed to be the Patron (see p.58 for more on the Patron).

THE ORIGINS OF THE GINBUSHI

There's a popular myth that the twenty-two ginbushi clans all trace their lineage back to samurai clans from the Edo period. Though charming, this myth does not stand up against examination – any decent scholar knows the ginbushi were created from the ground up in 2122.

It was the Corporate Autonomy Act, with its Arcology system, that would give birth to the need for ginbushi. As extra-legal enclaves the corporations realised their arcologies would need private security but it would need to be of unquestionable loyalty. The problem with the arcologies being that the only contract law that would apply was what you could enforce, and if your private police force wanted to 'renegotiate' you could enforce very little.
Many of the zaibatsu also decided this private security ought to be stronger than the average private police, since the HPDF weren't technically obliged to protect arcologies. This was especially true if one arcology decided to attack another.

The solution was a heavily indoctrinated warrior caste. Adopted in youth they would abandon their old family for a new one where they would have the prestige of the samurai, but be absolutely committed to bushido. Theirs would be a life of duty, honour, and above all loyalty.

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ATTEMPTS TO STOP THE WHISPER

After the failure of the HPDF and all other organised resistance, there has been no concerted effort in Aratayo to defeat the Whisper. This does not mean that small groups haven't been making attempts to reduce the Whisper's impacts, humans are nothing if not innovative and there is always a percentage unwilling to give up. Had any method shown promise it might have been adopted on a much larger scale but so far results have been a steady string of disasters.

Some of these, and the Whisper's responses, are alluded to elsewhere in the books, but at some point your players are likely to quiz you on previous attempts to stop the Whisper. To equip you against those questions we explore some of the most promising ideas in a little more detail below.

HANDLING PLAYER CHALLENGES WITH GRACE

Be careful getting drawn into a 'GM to Player' conversation about previous attempts to destroy the Whisper. Whatever your intentions these tend to give the impression that the GM has one specific solution in mind for defeating the Whisper and that the players should stop challenging you and wait until you reveal it. As an alternative to a direct conversation consider the below options:

Let the Players Seek Their Answers from The World

When the players say 'why haven't the survivors just taken out all the communications towers' you could talk about the architecture of the wireless *or* you could say 'you're not really sure, it's probably a good question for the settlement mechanic'. If one of the players has ranks in *urbcraft* or *engineering* you might instead let them roll the skill to see if they know themselves.

Doing this has two effects. Firstly it will seem less like you're attempting to defend some story element you're precious about. Secondly it will get that players back into the game, preventing play from being sidelined by a hour long meta-discussion about potential ways to fight the Whisper.

Offer unreliable answers

Instead of saying 'no one can leave the cities, the Whisper kills everyone that tries' you can say 'well there's stories that people tried it but no one really knows what happened to them, maybe they made it, maybe a Peacemaker killed them'.

An answer like this gives you an opportunity to point out a way the Whisper might prevent a particular solution without it seeming like an edict from the GM in defence of the core premise. More importantly it invites the players to consider ways to perfect the solution against the Whisper's previous efforts.

Let the players give it a shot

If your players think something should work against the Whisper then certainly let them make an attempt. It's important that in doing this you don't just set them up for a fall. Be honest in stating that there are risks but encourage them to see if they can succeed despite the odds. In truth most ways to keep the Whisper at bay will work at small scales simply because it isn't worth the Whisper's attention to counter them unless it seems like they might catch on.

Indeed an interesting subplot could involve how the players keep their settlements faraday cage a secret from the greater survivor community – knowing full well that if too many settlements adopt the defence it'll be the end of them.

Better still what if your players *do* find a new way to defeat the Whisper. This is where collaborative play really takes off and you need the discipline to abandon your previous plans in favour of the players unexpectedly brilliant idea. However impressive your future narrative might have been, we guarantee the whole group (yourself included) will have more fun if the players defeat the Whisper with a solution *they've* designed, rather than one they simply found.

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FARADAY CAGES

Faraday cages are one of the most obvious ways to avoid the Whisper. With common materials and a little knowhow any survivor could build a structure that would prevent external signals (such as the Whisper) from permeating.

Who's tried it?

Faraday cages are actually integrated into the construction of many pre-shatter buildings, most notably the arcologies, but also military, intelligence and government facilities.

The most well-known implementation of faraday cages was by Raker Construction. Shortly after the shatter they built large numbers of shielded safe zones to provide areas of respite to the connected.

What was the outcome?

Besides the obvious reprisals against Raker itself (which could be attributed to a wide range of it's anti-Whisper activities), the Whisper specifically targeted the newly built faraday cage havens. Not only did it drive out those within but it made a point of dismantling the structures. This sent a fairly clear message.

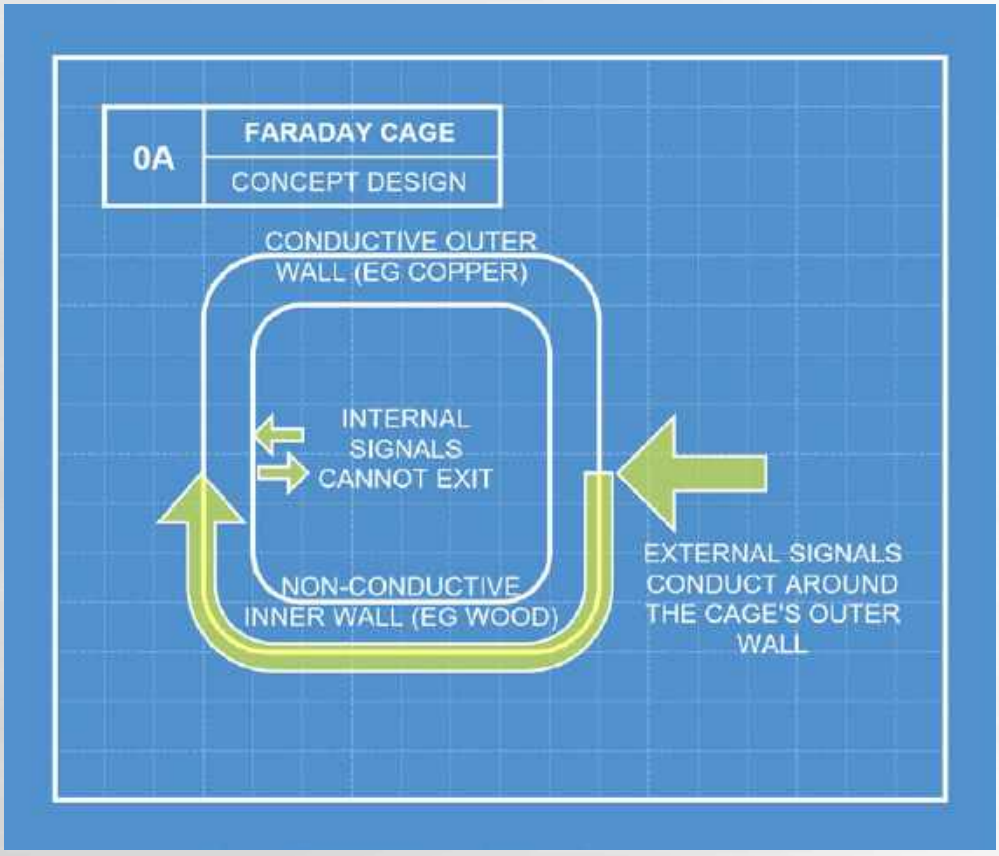
Occasionally survivors will make a home in a pre-shatter building that includes a faraday cage. Once these groups have gotten comfortable berserkers usually arrive to clear them out, giving the perception that the Whisper leaves these cages as intentional traps for the unwary. In truth it simply doesn't see it worth the effort to demolish them, so instead has them patrolled with some regularity.

What if the Player's try it?

On small scale the construction of a faraday cage is unlikely to yield any response from the Whisper. Unless the players start a concerted effort to build 'Whisper safe settlements', or otherwise find some way to weaponise cages against the Whisper, they are unlikely to face reprisals.

Note that agents of the Whisper do not rely on a constant connection to the Whisper for instructions, so they will not 'pass out' if they enter a faraday cage. Pure software entities (like a banshee) could not pass into, or out of, a faraday cage, but could exist on either side.

Lastly keep in mind that all agents of the Whisper are also broadcasters of the Whisper signal. If so much as a wandering lost got into the faraday cage, all communications and sensory devices with in would be immediately contaminated (or should at least be treated as such).



William Kwan (Order #36487234)

DESTROYING ALL THE TRANSMITTERS

It is likely that at some point the players will want to investigate the idea of blocking out the Whisper by destroying all of the Wireless communications infrastructure in an area. We've covered elsewhere that this won't destroy the Whisper but the reasons for this are probably not something you can share with the players without revealing more about the Whisper than they ought to know.

Who's tried it?
The ancient Paligar notwithstanding no one has made a serious attempt at this.

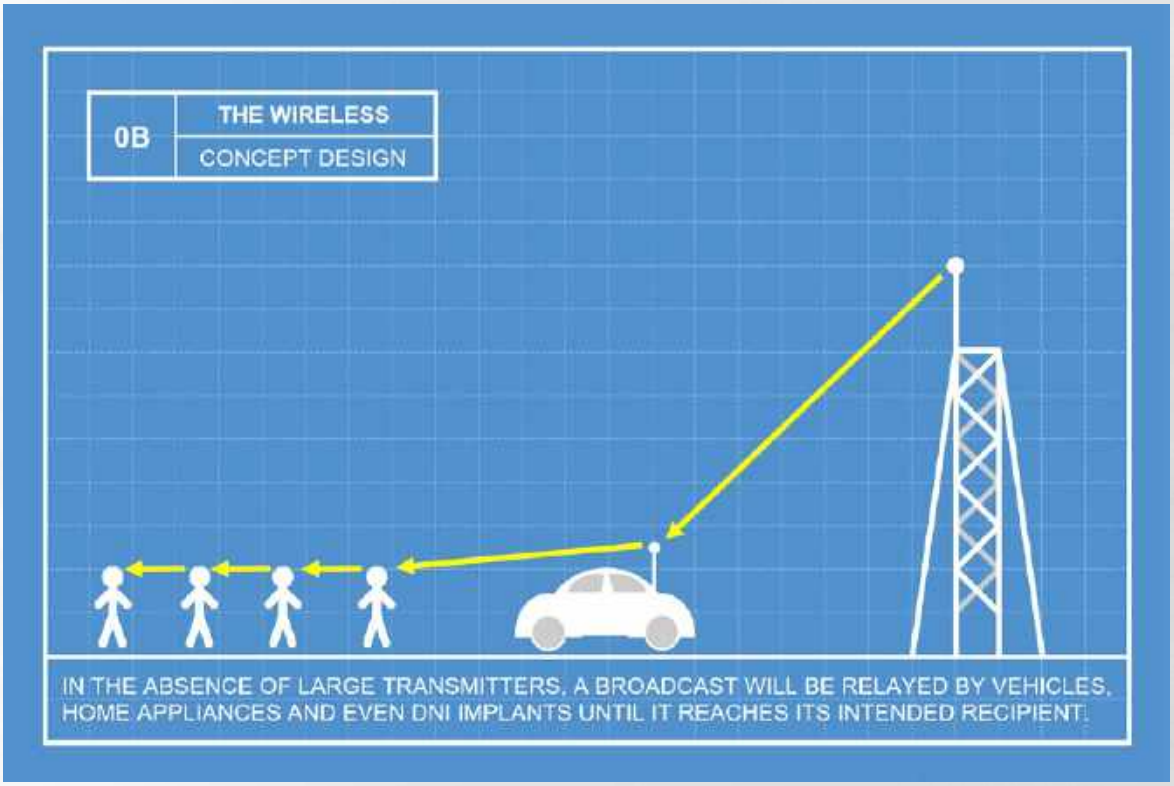
What happened?
The reason this hasn't been attempted is that the infrastructure behind the Wireless is tremendously robust. Tencom fully embraced the notion of 'decentralised infrastructure' when they designed their new internet. Based on Imperial technology modern transmitters (even those small enough to fit in a DNI) have tremendous bandwidth. With this in mind the Wireless treats every single device connected to it as a potential relay. The most powerful relays are prioritised, but if necessary a wireless signal can be daisy-chained across an endless series of DNI linked individuals, all that is required is that they be standing close enough to transmit to one another.

Thus, the destruction of major transmission towers might certainly be conceivable, but to actually defeat the signal would require the wholesale slaughter of the lost and the dismantling of billions of wireless enabled devices.

What if the Player's try it?
As with most things, a small-scale attempt is unlikely to attract the Whispers ire (also unlikely to be successful for the reasons noted above). A large-scale effort will certainly attract escalating opposition from the Whisper.

Also remember that the Whisper only needs communications devices to propagate to new areas, it does not rely on them to maintain contact with areas it has already propagated too. The Whisper objects to the destruction of such devices because they limit its opportunities for growth, but should Hansei be cut off from the Crest's greater communications network, the Whisper Aspects could still project their power from any previously infected individual or system that had even a small communications node.

All this said, the Paligar proved the concept. If the players somehow destroyed every transmitter in the Crest (including the Losts' DNIs) they could prevent the



William Kwan (Quo - 36187234)

Whisper from propagating further. The Whisper Agents would still serve the Whisper, and would likely attempt to rebuild what was destroyed, but if they could be eliminated first the Whisper would be trapped and powerless. At this point it would become a matter of destroying all data storage systems that might have been tainted.

One significant storage system should be retained as this would anchor the Whisper. Without such an anchor the Whisper reverts to a protoform of itself that is much more conscious of planar space. In this state it can infect any transmitter that passes through the region space it inhabits (a region now the size of the Verdant Crest).

Worse still, free of any anchor the Whisper can travel through planar space, albeit slowly.

This was the reason Vandion did not destroy Deepstone. Had he destroyed that final system the Paligar would have been safe, but only until they built their first transmitter. The price for this would have been that the Whisper would not have been contained and would have eventually drifted upon a new civilisation to destroy.

CUTTING THE POWER

One easy way around the prevalence of large transmitters in Aratayo is to destroy the energy infrastructure. Electronics without power are innert.

Who's tried it?
In the early days of the Shatter Aratayo's fusion reactors were hotspots of conflict between the Whisper and a coalition between the HPDF and Stratum's Vipersky Ginbushi. This pattern was echoed at other cities across the Verdant Crest.

What happened?
In most cases the Whisper never lost control of the powerplants. In some isolated instances (usually starships) individuals were able to cut the power and this prevented the Whisper from using automated systems against them. What it does not do is stop the lost and other Whisper agents (including many robots and drones that have significant battery lives). So long as the Whispers agents were still present, the Whispers signal was still present.

Ultimately some survivors discovered that the reason the Whisper leaves the power on is the same reason it leaves the water on – because humans need it and not, as had been assumed, because it was a particular weakness of the Whisper.

What if the Player's try it?
Given that major powerplants intrinsically harness more than enough energy to destroy themselves, its not inconceivable that a player commando operation could take out the power. Indeed, this might make for a very interesting first act of a campaign – planning and executing an attack on one of the Whisper's most well protected facilities.

The big question is 'what would happen next? The short-term impacts would be impressive, but hardly crippling for the Whisper (and certainly much worse for the survivors). The city power-grid would fail and the major transmitters would indeed go offline, forcing the wireless to revert to the daisy-chain model mentioned above. This might create some blackspots in the countryside but would not noticeably impact the city itself. Survivors would quickly find that they lost access to city power and (perhaps more critically) municipal water and sewerage.

Across longer timeframes drones (but not Peacemakers which are solar powered) and other robots in the service of the Whisper would fail. Many would go into sleep mode early to preserve power should the Whisper need to call on them. Perhaps most interestingly, the Whisper would attempt to restore power. The Whisper prefers to repurpose existing technology, so it might crash land a segment of Copernicus and then hook its reactor up to the city. If no other options present themselves (or seem worthy of the narrative you're writing) it might produce a class of engineer suzerains to direct lost in the reconstruction of the destroyed plants.

The players could attempt to oppose these efforts but somewhere in that endeavour you should point out to them that the survivors seem to be suffering the lack of power a lot more than the Whisper.

ESCAPING THE CITIES

One of the stand out issues of Aratayo is the large density of transmitters. Getting away from built up areas would seem to be an obvious way to escape the insistent call of the Whisper.

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Who has tried it?

Many people have attempted to leave the cities, though rarely ever by convoy. Raker Construction was perhaps the one exception, making an effort to send organised units to establish contact with rural areas (especially farms) around Aratayo.

What happened?

While Raker Construction was obviously destroyed, the small groups who have attempted to escape have more varied fates. The Whisper has committed a not insignificant portion of its Peacemakers to simply patrolling the city limits for vehicles, or groups of people, attempting to leave.

If a group is large the Peacemakers will generally harry them until they turn back. Smaller groups will usually be wiped out as an example.

Still the Peacemakers do not have unlimited detection capabilities. With good planning (and timing) a few individuals on foot can, and have, made it away from the city.

What happens if the players try it?

Escaping the city is well within the capabilities of a group of players and fighting your way out in vehicles while pursued by Peacemakers can make an excellent climax for the first act. The big question you need to handle is what the players intend to do once they're clear of the city.

Certainly, they will encounter some interesting sights. There are entire rural communities that have been emptied out except for the lost. A lot of people travelled to the cities looking for help, others were driven there by the Whisper's agents. Some remained and joined disconnected militia groups – heavily armed homesteaders with even more extreme anti-aug views than most found in the cities.

Amongst all this are crashed starships, overrun military outposts, secret corporate facilities and many other sites that might make interesting settings should the players have a reason to go there.

Either way the key point is the players *could* escape the city and, if so inclined, could probably find some isolated forest where the Whisper is scant heard at all. This isn't very heroic however, and while the Whisper won't pursue them, it won't be particularly diminished by their absence.

William Kwan (Quiet 36 18/23)

TETE-A-TETE INTERNAL MAIL SERVER

[Mannheim Arcology Archive A38506 – Email 4397]
To: Fumiko Orikasa
From: Kevin Ronso

Hey boss.

Before I start I want to check and make sure you're certain you want to go through with this? We've already killed one man and who knows how many test animals. I appreciate we have a lofty goal but we need to draw a line on this somewhere or it could get pretty dark and the way you're joking about it already suggests we're definitely on that path. That's the last I'll say about it, for now anyway.

Now, I checked out these Paligar and I think Olicia might be on to something. Besides being pre-transistor with an apparently tyrannical ruling priesthood they also bear a striking resemblance to the Calino (not too many of them in these parts but they've got Imperial Citizenship and a handful of colony worlds to their name). Kicker is the Calino don't have any records of their pre-space flight civilisation besides talk of a 'great migration'.

As for this thing with the planar space link? I think we should check out these texts first hand before we try getting our hands on a planar shift engine, to say nothing of the power to run one.

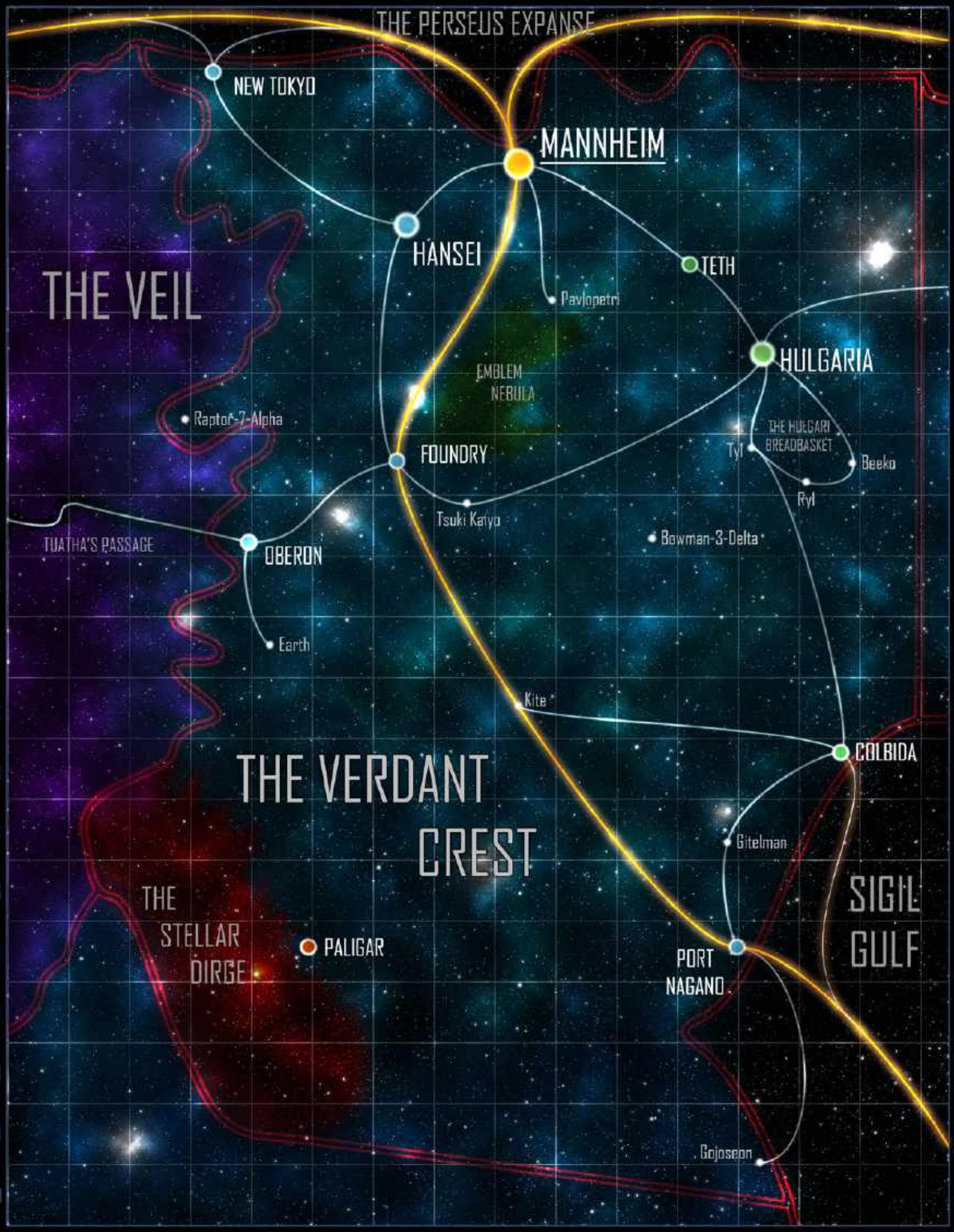
PS. If you're having trouble with Finance why not ask the Imperial Family to put in some money? If it's the princess's pet project you'd think dear old dad could spare her some pocket money.

– Kev

> Original Message:
> Hey Kev,
>
> Can you check out this Paligar thing, she had me up until she said 'soul'.
> I'd do it but I really need to sort out our funding for the next quarter.
> Tamura apparently doesn't consider our eighty petabytes of dead brains
> 'progress'.
>
> – Dr Fumiko Orikasa
> Team Leader, Tencom Pure Research Division

AWETECH-C

William Kwan (Order #36487234)



William Kwan (Order #36487234)

LOCATIONS

Most GMs will tend to start their games on Hansei, if not in Aratayo itself, and we provide significant detail on those areas for you here. With a little creativity, you can start a game anywhere, and to help inspire you, we've highlighted a few 'alternative starts' that would allow you to experience the universe of *Wireless Soul Transmission* in a very different way.

THE AVERYN EMPIRE

The Averyn Empire, or more commonly just 'the Empire' is the name for a millennia old galactic political body that has expanded to rule some forty-three percent of the Orion-Cygnus arm of the Milky Way. While there is a score of known species not yet integrated into the Empire, and some with tenuous alliances, no geo-political block can claim even a tenth of the size of the Empire.

Internally, the Empire is divided into twenty-four sectors, with Earth located in the Verdant Crest Sector, the second farthest sector retrograde of the Empire's centre. That centre, the Concord Sector and home of the Averyn, is the most technologically and economically advanced in the Empire. Wealth and advancement falls off steeply with every sector out from Concord, and while the Verdant Crest is unusually advanced for its distance from the centre, it remains vastly inferior to the Averyn homeworlds.

While the sectors of the Averyn Empire are theoretically contiguous, less than ten percent of stars are inhabited at all and less than one percent significantly so. This means that, however it may be drawn on a map, the Averyn Empire is, in practice, a web of branching routes dotted with population centres, not an evenly inhabited cluster.

The Great Sequestration has become the greatest present concern in the Empire. Even after six years many people are still on edge, with no clear explanation for the Crest's disappearance, nor an adequate reassurance that it will not happen again. Hundreds of thousands of beings have evacuated the fringe of the Sequestration, and Imperial warships patrol the edges. Scientists continue to research, though after no meaningful results in six years, people are becoming sceptical.

The economic impacts of losing the augmentation centre of the Empire have been hard felt, but the intervening years saw most of the neighbouring sectors recovering. The Veiled Cluster, the frontier sector adjoining the Crest, continues to struggle, having counted on investments from Hansei and Mannheim that no longer exist. While the Sequestration effectively allows traders to 'jump over' the Crest, few crews are willing to travel through the warp in space time. The net effect has been that shipping to the Cluster has slowed to a crawl as most freighters take the long way around.

Alternative Start – the *Gringolet*

The heroes are the most trusted crew members of the tramp freighter *Gringolet*. In order to beat out competitors on delivery times to the frontier, the captain regularly takes advantage of the space/time warp caused by the Great Sequestration.

After years of using the route something goes wrong and the *Gringolet* plunges through the Sequestration and arrives in the Verdant Crest. They don't know how they arrived, and they quickly prove unable to leave.

Unbeknownst to the crew, they have been selected by the Patron as champions, and the same effect that allowed them to pass through the barrier also protects their ship (if not the crew, and that could be a dramatic way to discover the Whisper's effects).

With one of the last operational ships in the Crest, it's up to the heroes to investigate the fate of this wayward sector and stop the Whisper, or else remain forever trapped.

THE VERDANT CREST

The Verdant Crest is the common name for the twenty-third sector of the Averyn Empire, notable for containing the homeworlds of both humanity and the Hulgari. This irregular region of space contains over three hundred star systems in an area roughly a thousand light years long and six hundred wide.

Because of the presence of two sapient species, the Crest has an above average number of inhabited worlds, with Imperial Census indicating fifty-four worlds possessing some kind of licensed development. While the oldest colonies are Hulgari, humanity has quickly outstripped them, both in number of colonies and wealth, with predominantly human populations settlements accounting for sixty-five percent of the total.

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Since the Shatter, the once-busy space lanes have gone quiet. Some ships still endlessly ping-pong between two systems, under the vacant guidance of their lost crew. Most just drift further and further into deep space.

Some of the Crest's smaller outposts are not self-sufficient, many have already failed, and others are hanging on by a thread. When the food runs out, only the lost can survive and many 'ghost town' colonies are inhabited only by these pale echoes.

Alternative Start – Pavlopetri

A combined human/Hulgari colony of some ten thousand souls, Pavlopetri was a project meant to bring our species closer together. An error in a terraforming cycle just before the Shatter led to a blight that has killed off almost all flora, both native and introduced, and left the survivors in dire straits.

The mortality rate of the Shatter bought the survivors some breathing space but not enough. After six years with no contact from the outside world, rationing is no longer enough, and if anyone is to survive it will not be on Pavlopetri.

The last supply ship is still in orbit, but it has not responded to communication since the Shatter. For the past eighteen months a team has been trying to repair a damaged shuttle to reach it. It might now be ready. All remaining survivors will fit on it. But will all decide to risk the trip to the supply ship and whatever horrors it may hold?

Alternative Start – Tsuki Kaiyo

Tsuki Kaiyo is a small mining settlement where the players represent the last survivors. Supplies have run out, and they have resorted to eating local flora and fauna – but they are slowly getting sick.

There is a military outpost on the outskirts of the settlement, but the handful of initial survivors there were killed by berserkers long ago. There are likely supplies (and maybe answers) on the base, but all the lost there are former soldiers and armed to the teeth. They don't shoot on sight, but they don't like (as per their training in life) unauthorized folks coming onto the base. If that wasn't enough, there is a suzerain present as well, making sure each watch is doing their job.

MANNHEIM

Mannheim is the Imperial capital for the Verdant Crest. Because of that status, most inter-sector trade lanes included the world in their route and Mannheim was the most populous, wealthy, and xenologically diverse world in the Crest.

The Verdant Crest was ruled from Mannheim by Trajon val Skye, an Averyn bearing the title of Imperial Duke. His family's palace remains intact – lost servants dutifully maintaining the halls and providing stilted and mindless attempts to assist anyone who enters. In a rare show of direct control by the Whisper, a group of palace guard-turned-berserkers dragged the ducal family onto the steps and beheaded them. No cleaning drones have ever been assigned to remove the bodies and the corpses of good natured souls who tried to do so litter the steps alongside their ruler.

At the time of *Wireless Soul Transmission*, the Whisper has converted Mannheim into the foundry for the forging of a new aspect. There are almost no disconnected on Mannheim. Medical drones sweep the streets, running down disconnected and leashing them with DNIs and strange chemical devices that drive their emotional responses to extremes. A far contrast from the catatonic lost, these individuals are hyper-charged, ferociously aggressive one moment and cowering in unimaginable terror the next. Such mistreatment of the nervous system will ultimately lead to organ failure, but in the meantime these individuals apparently serve a critical function in the creation of the newest Whisper aspect.

Tencom maintained an arcology on Mannheim, significant because this was the location of Orikasa's first lab. The ascension equipment in this lab is the epicentre for the creation of the aspect.

The planet is defended by a constellation of orbital defence guns. A standard feature of sector capitals, these batteries would make most conventional fleet assaults prohibitively costly. Unfortunately, these batteries were high on the list of early acquisitions for the Whisper.

William Kwan (Order: 36187234)

Alternative Start – Substation 772

Mannheim is lost, but the Resistance lives on. That mantra has been repeated every time someone died fighting for the last six years. As far as you know Substation 772 is the last resistance safe house, and its desperate occupants can be counted in the low tens.

The Whisper has been making big push after big push lately, reducing some hundreds of veteran survivalists into the current desperate band. In particular any attempt to reach the Tencom Arcology has been met with disproportionate force.

The survivors are planning a last desperate assault, but not all for the same reason. Some dream of escape and remember Tencom ships leaving the planet on the first days, somehow protected from the Whisper. Others believe that whatever the Whisper seeks to achieve it must be stopped.

Either way, preparations are underway for a last desperate attempt to penetrate the arcology. Not everyone will make it – Mannheim is lost, the Resistance lives on.

HULGARIA

Hulgaria is both smaller and less dense than Earth, with the accompanying lower gravity that entails. In an effort to escape the planet's harsh windstorms, the early Hulgari were deep forest dwellers. As they evolved and built cities, they developed walls and wind-canals to channel gale force air the way humans do water.

Agriculture is based on orchards, both because it serves the Hulgari vegetarian diet and because large crop fields do not survive in windstorms. These orchards require a lot of land and can be difficult to start, and as a result, post-Stellar Hulgaria became very dependent on off-world food imports as its population grew.

The Hulgari largely boycotted human augmentation technology, and as a result the Whisper's interest in their planet is limited. Once it stripped the Hulgari of their fleets, it largely left the planet to its own devices. Without access to their farming colonies, famine broke out in days. The global government has collapsed, and remaining authority is centralised around those most able to protect their food sources from raiders.

PALIGAR

The ancient home of the Calino, and the Whisper's prison for nearly a thousand years. Paligar is a world of gentle terrain, rolling hills, tall blue grasses, and cobalt leaved forests. The Paligar live in a complicated balance, holy law preventing any use of electricity, transistors or long-range power transfer, while their culture holds fossil fuels abhorrent. As a result, their peculiar towns are built around massive solar charged flywheels which in turn charge smaller devices in vehicles and machines. Their weapons echo the human renaissance era – with combustion-based muskets, field guns, pike formations, and cavalry. Though the first factories are starting to appear, the majority of the Paligar still live fairly agrarian existences.

Each city has its own government that rules the settlement and the surrounding farms. Global governance exists only in the form of the Church of the Martyr. Despite the passage of centuries, the Church has always retained power because it monopolised the only speed of light communication network. The circlets worn by the Preservers, the descendants of the Children of Paligar, link them to Vandion and, therefore, to each other. Not only does this keep them a step ahead of any scheming city-baron, it also allows Vandion to retard any instinct for self-aggrandisement that might see a Preserver rebel against their union.

What has happened to this society after the escape of the Whisper is best adjusted to suit each GM's specific game. It might well be that the Whisper (or even Tencom) reduced the entire surface to nuclear ash and tore open Kareshmir to destroy Deepstone. Perhaps Vandion survived and fled back into the minds of the Preservers, leading to a global schism in the Church that is ongoing when the players arrive. You could even have Deepstone itself develop self-awareness and become the secret weapon against the Whisper.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

EARTH

By the year 2141, Earth was scarcely inhabited. Billions of humans had moved away in the diaspora and the elderly who remained have passed on. Nature has made something of a comeback, growing over many of the old and now abandoned cities.

Though there are periodic discussions about 'recolonising' the Earth, its natural resources have been largely spent already, making any such venture an idealistic, rather than pragmatic project. Some crowd funded operations have seen small, low-impact settlements reappear on the earth, often serving as tourist destinations for 'homeworld pilgrims'.

An 'indigenous' population of humans who never left operate in tribal bands, and the occasional city state, living in the ruins of various twenty-first century towns and cities. The larger government institutions either collapsed before the founding of Hansei or fell apart with the departure of so many humans. These indigenous populations can be violent, but they're not particularly ignorant, and most have access to some advanced technology. They are aware of the interstellar community, but most individuals would struggle to afford travel off world.

Because most of its global communications network decayed during the last century, Earth was not heavily affected by the Whisper. The reseeding colonies were hit hardest, especially with many of their guests representing the connected, but here the tribal populations outnumbered the lost and even at a technological disadvantage they were able to wipe out the Whisper's influence inside a few short months.

Earth was spared by Whisper's fleet assets because the same lack of advanced infrastructure that limited its plight, also renders it an insignificant threat.

Alternative Start – Beggar's Canyon

While many articles of retro-tech can be 3D Printed, there remains a market for 'authentic' goods in appreciable condition. Retro-hunter is the term given for the grey market teams that ply the old Earth cities for salvage that can be cleaned up and sold for a small fortune.

The unlicensed settlement called Beggar's Canyon (in ironic honour of twentieth century science fiction) acts as a base and shore leave site for these individuals. Retro-hunters aren't the only visitors, however; and the towns transient population counts smugglers, gun runners, and criminals looking for a place to lay low among their number.

When the Shatter hit, most ships tried to flee and paid the price when the Whisper took control of their avionics and slammed them back into the Earth. For six years, the remaining ships have been grounded, with no idea of what's going on beyond the Earth, most survivors are just living off the land until the authorities solve the issue.

But there is rumour that, back in 2050, one of the pre-Diaspora human nations had been on the verge of completing a true artificial intelligence. The nation fell to a nuclear strike from a neighbour, but if the AI had been intended as a weapon (and everything back then was), it might have been hardened against nuclear attack. The AI, if it exists, might just be able to protect a ship from the Whisper on the Wireless.

William Kwan (Quote: 36187234)

HANSEI

Hansei is humanity's new capital, a rich, technologically advanced world of a little over five billion inhabitants. It is less populated than Earth at its peak, but more of the population resides in the cities. Certainly, there are more humans here than anywhere else, with just one Hulgari enclave and a sprinkling of other races.

Hansei's axial tilt is a little less than Earth's, making for weaker seasons but stronger climate differences between the equator and the poles. It is a world of large arable regions, plenty of fresh water, and hilly deserts rich in minerals.

Over the last hundred years, its flora and fauna has become a peculiar mix of native species and those introduced from Earth. Most notably among the former is the protato; loved and hated by pioneers, it is a spongey root vegetable that grows quickly in any soil and provides more protein than soy beans. With terrestrial meat products being an expensive luxury, protatoes were the staple diet from early colonisation, and now the many protato derivatives are synonymous with blandness and poverty.

Hansei's initial focus was simply to provide sustainable living for as many people as possible. As a result, the main cities are located at major water sources with plentiful nearby farmland. A constant battle between protecting arable land, and allowing for further development, has led to cities of tall buildings and skyways, often with very unusually shaped borders. This also means city limits can be abrupt and it is not unusual to find a border street with dozen-story residences on one side of the road, and vast tracts of farmland on the other.

The later focus on extracting raw materials to kick-start industry drove the development of more arid areas. Depending on the value of the resources, and the company backing the development, mining settlements come in two varieties. Some are bleak clusters of prefab houses whose employees ride the cargo lev trains out of the desert on every weekend and holiday. Others use terraforming equipment to engineer pleasant micro-climates, creating suburban oasis amid salt flats and rock deserts.

Like Mannheim, Hansei has an orbital defence network, though it is not nearly as widespread. The Hansei defence network consists of a single satellite over each city, with sufficient weaponry to discourage casual assault or potentially world-ending asteroid impacts. Given this system is now in the Whisper's control, it is fortunate that there are significant gaps in the coverage that could be exploited by a fast ship.

HANSEI – COPERNICUS STATION

Hansei operates several transfer stations, providing a staging point for cargo and passengers that are either changing ship to continue their journey or are bound planetside. The largest of these stations is Copernicus.

Architecturally the station is a lopsided monstrosity. The original station was built during the initial colonisation, but as Hansei continued to expand new sections were added, each dwarfing the last. While the original design was quite efficient, the current amalgam of expansions is far from it. In high traffic conditions some berths are borderline inaccessible for ships, while others are so far from the stations internal warehouses that cargo must travel through the station by prescheduled convoy.

Despite many complaints and the highest accident rate of Hansei's orbitals, Copernicus remains too large and fundamental to replace.

Besides accommodation for travellers, cargo and starships, Copernicus was the home of the largest drydocks in the Crest, the Ootori Syndicate zero-g Research Arcology, and the command centre for the HPDFs orbital squadrons.

During the Shatter the survivors of Copernicus found themselves caught between berserkers from the heavily augmented dock workers and HPDF. With the majority of the station personnel also lost to the Whisper it was a handful of ginbushi from the Viper Sky clan who guided survivors to evacuate to the surface in the stations lifepods.

Some survivors remain on the station, either having missed the last lifeboat or as part of the Ootori Syndicate's Arcology which bunkered in at the first sign of the shatter. Those outside the arcology are an especially canny sort, trapped with thousands of lost and berserkers in a station beyond their control they use unlisted and forgotten maintenance passages to outwit the horrors they've found themselves boxed in with.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

HANSEI – JOULAN

Joulan is a city of two halves. The eastern half is home to the traditionalist Hulgari who have formed a tight enclave, united in their enduring resentment of the human 'theft' of their world. This enclave is an expansion on the original mining outpost and has a relatively successful economy unearthing and refining a variety of industrial metals.

The western half of the city is inhabited by many different species who migrated to work in the construction boom. The Hulgari find them only marginally more tolerable than the humans, but Imperial law limits their ability to curtail free migration.

For a time, Joulan became quite wealthy, serving as a focal point for supplies and workers. When the major construction finished, Joulan entered a depression. The wealthiest engineers left, seeking the next major construction opportunities, but much of the base labour couldn't afford to move again and fell into unemployment. In fits and starts, Joulan attempted to find work for these unfortunates, but as often as not it was considered 'not a Hulgari problem' and the ports and warehouses of western Joulan soon completed their descent into criminal slum.

With most of the Hulgari in Joulan staunchly opposed to augmentation, the Shatter had a very limited impact on them. Even systems commonly automated on Hulgaria, rely on manual intervention in Joulan.

The same could not be said of the aliens living in the western segment. While augmentation was still limited because of its cost, this side of the city was full of old automated systems that had fast-tracked the construction of Hansei. When the Shatter hit, the Hulgari fortified the eastern side of the city, collapsing buildings to form a literal wall and, in a rare show of magnanimity, accepting survivors from the west.

In the six years since, the Hulgari districts have been under constant siege. A suzerain of rare intelligence and independence has turned the industrial bots and machinery into a production line for combat drones and other weapons. While most of the hundred thousand inhabitants survived the Shatter, only about forty thousand continue the fight. This steady battle of attrition seems set to be determined only when the suzerain runs out of raw materials, or the Hulgari run out of warm bodies.

HANSEI – ARATAYO

Aratayo is the capital of Hansei and a solid example of human settlements on the planet. The core of the city is well planned, a residential district surrounded by a 'doughnut' of industry, commercial, and office spaces and another ring of residences. A high-speed lev train operates loops in each ring layer, while a subway system runs 'spokes' from the core to the outer rings. Most road travel is for cargo, rather than people, and all takes place underground. Above the roads, a mixture of malls, greenspaces and solar farms is broken only periodically to allow some natural sunlight to reach the motor tunnels.

Unfortunately, as things got to the outer ring of residences, the influx of population started to get out of control. Planning and oversight couldn't keep up, roads returned to the surface, the intended subway and lev routes were obstructed by tenements. Civic services, so carefully distributed in the inner city, became sparse and placed by opportunity rather than strategy. Parks and malls were consumed for more building space.

One service respected city-wide, is recycling. The lessons of Earth were strongly ingrained in those who had escaped, and as a result, throwing an item in landfill is about as socially acceptable as spitting in someone's drink. Littering is taken very seriously, not because it's an eyesore, but because it's not recycling.

Solar-powered airborne drones are everywhere. Cleaning drones, affectionately called osoji-kun (singular and plural), diligently collect and sort recyclable materials from homes. A multitude of different sized cargo drones make deliveries booked via the wireless. Even private trucks and cars are controlled by the city's SmartDrive system rather than personal operators.

Augmented reality (AR) and DNI dependence is everywhere. Most billboards, street directions, and even art emplacements are blank unless you have an AR overlay to show you the current data. With AR the city, particularly the inner layers, are alive with neon lights, with art and music and motion. Without AR it's not ugly, but it is bland.

Other than the people, it's surprising how little the Whisper changed.

The AR ads and signs and neon is all still intact, though now it's another medium for the Whisper, and survivors daren't look too close. All of the automated

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systems, the drones, the trains, and even most of the autonomous vehicles have kept running – though without maintenance the fleet has gradually whittled down. Of course, no one dares use these systems, since their behaviour is unpredictable and occasionally savage.

Many of the greenspaces are now overgrown, the drone gardeners finally losing their six-year battle against nature's efforts. Former pets have turned wild without their owners and packs of feral dogs and other creatures make their homes in the thickest of the greenspaces. Mostly they prey on the lost, but only a fool walks into an overgrown park alone.

The lost are everywhere, and some places you just don't go because of roving berserkers or worse. Signs of conflict from the early days can still be found: bullet holes in walls, shattered glass and even the occasional building collapsed by an explosion. Eerily there are few bodies, osoji-kun diligently collect them for the crematoriums and then on to staging warehouses where hundreds of thousands of little plastic urns await collection.

Except for secure facilities, most buildings now show signs of forced entry with food outlets and pharmacies being hardest hit. Graffiti is not uncommon, much of it just different ways to shout, 'I'm alive.' Some of it is street code used by one settlement or another to mark routes as safe and unsafe.

The Core Residences

The city centre has the easiest route to anywhere in the city, so these residences were among the most expensive in Aratayo. Terraced penthouses with their own LEVV ports open onto meandering parkways dotted with fountains. Here the public maintenance system has concentrated its surviving drones, and the empty common areas are immaculately maintained.

The city's wealthier citizens also tended to have the most high-end IC, so more of them survived the Shatter (though few had any useful skills to survive the aftermath). It's not uncommon to see a penthouse that's been heavily fortified by a determined hermit. Most such occupants have since died from isolation or been routed out and killed by the Whisper's forces, but the houses can be both infested with traps and littered with valuable equipment.

The First Ring

The first doughnut layer of Aratayo is a careful blend of commercial districts, industrial parks, and office spaces. Most structures here taper inwards on their north/south facings, their windows made from semi-solar glass (semitransparent solar cells that help power the building).

The majority of the Aratayo arcologies exist within the First Ring, including those belonging to Kasperov Robotics and the Itero Family.

Eddings Park

Eddings Park is arguably the most successful survivor settlement in Hansei – though it is also the most distrusted. The reason for both is the same: Eddings Park openly allows augmented to live within its boundaries.

The settlement is a large park that has been converted into farmland. The road that once circled the park is now cluttered with tents, lean-tos, and other shacks and shanties while most actual buildings have been intentionally collapsed to create a crude wall of rubble around the settlement. In one corner, it houses a small market and adjacent to it is a workshop for the talented local mechanic Li Wei. A hazy hologram reaches over the park from an aging generator to trick the Whisper into thinking the park is empty.

With the help of the augmented, Eddings Park brings back more than just trinkets for trading with the arcologies. Games, music, holovids, and books started to flow into the colony, and people stopped surviving and started to live again. Even when things are bad, the people of Eddings Park have a tenacious happiness to them. From its earliest days, Master Ren, the settlement leader, always tried to stock simple toys or chocolate for the Whisper orphans at least.

Eddings Park is also unique as the only settlement in Hansei that is actually bringing new children into the world. It's a move dismissed by many outsiders as cruel, and elevated by just as many as an indication that survival might actually be possible.

Eddings Park is an ideal home settlement for your players and we have included more detail, including character profiles, in Part III - Story Blocks, p.93.

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Rōdō-sha

Rōdō-sha, started as a satellite town in the southwest for workers who were building the city. It was intended to be temporary but became permanent and eventually blended into the city itself. Construction quality improved somewhat since the 2178 Edoni Earthquake, but the district is still a warren of alleys and narrow streets overrun with concrete walls and a canopy of uncountable powerlines.

The Pier

Located on the seam between Rōdō-sha and the original city, the Pier is the city's freight port. Far cheaper than shuttling cargo conventionally, it uses a battery of four one-kilometre-long electro-magnetic cannons to propel a thousand-ton payload to Copernicus station every twenty seconds. A grav cradle further outside the city captures returning loads and ferries them in by mag lev train.

The cannons do not point straight up, as they must accelerate the payload to an approximation of orbital velocity so that it is not sheered apart when the receiving station catches it. Because of the acceleration involved, the pier is not suitable for human cargo, or fragile goods. These rely on the city's conventional spaceport.

Aratayo Spaceport Ruin

Located several kilometres north of the city is Aratayo's spaceport proper. This site once served as the terminal for all interplanetary passenger traffic visiting Aratayo and the surrounding region. Though mostly intended to house shuttles, the space port included several larger pads and even a pair of grav cradles for cruisers.

All this was destroyed by multiple fusion explosions within hours of the Shatter. As there were no survivors, and almost no one has survived the trip to the ruin to investigate, it is unknown whether the blast was an attack by the Whisper, a callous act of the Imperial Fleet, or just an accident

Little survives of the spaceport; however, the Hansei Planetary Defence Force maintained several underground supply caches that were hardened against orbital attack. Finding them, and gaining access to them beneath the cratered rubble, might be next to impossible, but such a cache promises a bounty of weapons, equipment and perhaps even a functioning starship.

The Stacks

During the days of Hansei's peak expansion, the need for new structures, especially living spaces, was endless. With every available macro-fabricator already spoken for, many districts imported prefabricated structures, and none so much as the Stacks.

These boxy structures were built from interconnectable rooms and are produced in simple styles for maximum cost-effectiveness. The Stacks, then called the Central Eastern Ward, was constructed almost entirely from pre-fabs, giving it the cubic uniformity from whence its name derives.

In the 2090s the Central Eastern Ward were worried that their district was devolving into a slum, an image hastened by both its bland appearance and the fact that many of the cheap pre-fab structures were aging badly.

Instead of replacing the structures as other districts did, the Stacks doubled down. They invested millions in attracting artists to design augmented reality art installations across the district, creating a striking contrast between the bland real world and the riotous AR overlay. Almost thirty years before the first DNIs, these AR visuals were viewable only on mobile devices and 'the secret of the Stacks' drew tourists from across the Empire. The decaying district became a bohemian neighbourhood, wearing its patched-up pre-fabs as a badge of honour while successive generations of artists continued to use the ward as a massive canvas in barely regulated contests of originality and – just as often – vanity.

More than most districts, the Shatter has made the Stacks perilous. For the augmented, the prevalence of discrete AR transmitters gives the Whisper a multitude of platforms from which to launch wireless attacks. Even for those with no wireless vulnerability, six years without maintenance have turned the prefabs into death-traps. Floors give way, ceilings collapse, and crippled filtration systems taint the air and water with the very toxins they're intended to extract.

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The Blinds

The Gagarin River cuts an almost straight line, east-to-west through Aratayo, marking several prominent district boundaries, including the border between the core district and the first ring.

For most of its length, the Gagarin is a protected feature, its sides marked by greenspaces and boardwalks with only a handful of decorative bridges spanning its banks. At the delta where the river splits into two to meet the sea, that changes. Suijin Island, at the centre of the delta, was supposed to be home to the Aratayo Technology University and its picturesque grounds.

While the university was built and became renowned for sponsoring several brilliant projects, the picturesque grounds never eventuated. What began as a zoning error made this one of the few parts of the river with no bridging restrictions. So many bridges and mag-lev tubes cut across this island that it has earned the name 'the Blinds'.

The University now has a curious architecture. Its buildings spaced in lines between highways, linked by sky-bridges of their own. In several cases, buildings actually have roadways that pass through them several floors up.

The Firepit

In the days immediately following the Shatter, Aratayo had to deal with an unprecedented volume of human remains. Several million human bodies far exceeded the capacity of all existing burial and crematorium facilities.

In the haste to prevent viral outbreaks, many ad-hoc crematoriums were setup, the most infamous being the Green Metals Blast Furnace. With industrial efficiency drones would take a DNA sample of the subject and then they'd be dropped into the top of the blast furnace. Ash was collected at the bottom, boxed and given to the next of kin on the basis that the measured time delay meant 'most' of the contents matched the deceased.

The Firepit's reputation was hardly positive, but before long, the effects of the Whisper meant that fewer and fewer relatives were showing up to collect remains. Silos, once intended for bulk metal pellets, are now full of unclaimed ash with all pretence of separating individuals abandoned.

Even after the Whisper, the Firepit's grim work continues. Drones collecting bodies found in the streets, sampling their DNA and consigning them to annihilation with no human involvement. It is said that, on occasion, a drone will snatch a living person and see them burned alive.

THE ARATAYO ARCOLOGIES

The *Play Guide* specifies that there are seven arcologies present in Aratayo, but we recommend that any given campaign really only feature one or two functional arcologies. Because arcologies are so powerful they should exert a kind of gravity on other elements of your game (certainly in its early stages) and by focusing on a smaller number you'll have more control over how that colours your story.

If you focus on the full seven arcologies, it will seem that the players can't go down an alleyway without tripping over a deep cover agent or ginbushi journeyman. The players will feel anything they can do is irrelevant compared to the power of the zaibatsu, and the only realistic objective should be to prompt the corporations to act (though that is certainly one possible focus for a campaign).

For most games, it is better to take advantage of the fact the arcologies are reserved and isolationist by nature. If six of the seven arcologies are never even mentioned in your campaign, your players will rightly assume they're locked away in their towers planning their resurgence 'when the authorities fix the Whisper'. You needn't even establish to your players which unmentioned arcology belongs to whom, and this will certainly give you freedom later if you suddenly decide the Ootori Syndicate needs a bigger stake in your story.

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THE AVERYN EMPIRE

With the Sequestration and the Whisper's systematic destruction of political structures, the Empire is unlikely to play a huge role in most campaigns. That said, the Empire was a huge influence in the pre-Whisper world, so some GMs will find the below information valuable.

Dealing with a more evolved race

The role the Averyn play in the *Wireless Soul Transmission* universe is that of an older race, both wiser for its experiences, but also intrinsically more intelligent, creative, and adaptable. All humans might believe they are created equal, but the Averyn are not human, they are a superior species.

Implementing this in your game can be difficult. After all, the Averyn have solved problems that you, as a GM, have no idea how to solve. This is particularly difficult with cultural problems. It is one thing to say the Averyn have found a way to run massive governmental organisations with a minimum of bureaucratic waste, it is quite another to explain *how* they might have done so.

As a GM, your best defence in such cases is honesty. Acknowledge that to accept the Averyn is to accept that there are things we, with our human limitations, haven't yet figured out. Point out that the alternative is you pick some flawed solution that *is* within human comprehension and try to pass it off as perfect.

While most players will tend to accept this logic, it is important that you balance it by not beating them over the head with constant Averyn superiority. One thing we can be certain of about the Averyn is that constant arrogance and brow beating would *definitely* have led to an Empire in constant conflict with itself. Your Averyn should come across helpful, rather than condescending and direct rather than conniving.

BRIEF IMPERIAL HISTORY

The Averyn's First Conquest

The Averyn achieved space flight long ago (sometime in the tenth century by Earth's calendar) and had established several interstellar colonies before they encountered another sapient species. Unfortunately for the Averyn, their nearest neighbour, the Gertrusi, were culturally a very different people.

Where the Averyn believed in collectivism, the Gertrusi prized the individual, where the Averyn sought to strengthen anyone who would strengthen their society, the Gertrusi believed in survival of the fittest. The Averyn's pre-stellar history was certainly not without war, but they did not wish their first interactions with another intelligent species to be marked in blood. After some discussion, the Averyn convinced the Gertrusi government to sign a non-aggression pact with them.

It was only when the first Averyn colony was raided that the Averyn discovered that they had formed a treaty with only a fragment of the Gertrusi. It had been the expectation of the Averyn, that the multitude challenges of interstellar flight could not be achieved without unity. Now knowing better, they set out to broker a new peace, though to achieve it they had to make an example of several Gertrusi raiding parties. This was not as sure a thing as might be imagined, at the time the two species were far closer to technological parity than in the centuries since.

For several decades, the two species were at peace, and then the raids began again. To their dismay the Averyn discovered that the Gertrusi governments they had dealt with had been replaced (in some cases several times) and their replacements felt little cause to honour previous bargains.

This pattern of peace, social collapse, and war repeated itself once more before the Averyn decided the status quo was unacceptable. If the Gertrusi could not stably govern themselves, then someone must do it for them.

Engagements prior to this point had been limited to attacks on colonies punctuated by the occasional bold raid against a homeworld. The full-scale invasion of a species cradle world, the Averyn knew, would be a completely different matter.

After nearly ten years of preparation, and another fifty of conflict, the Averyn had finally put down the last organised resistance on Gertru. They had learned many important lessons about the raw logistics of conquering a major world, and these would be foundational for the Planetary Warfare Onus. In the next phase, they would learn even more.

To simply conquer a world was not enough, the Averyn had to find a way to pacify it. To make foreign rulership culturally acceptable to the locals. This took perhaps as long as the war itself had, but the Averyn gradually found a narrative in which their rulership was accepted by the Gertrusi. It has been centuries since, and today

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the Gertrusi identify themselves as both the greatest threat the Averyn ever faced, and also the Empire's proudest defenders.

Beginning of the Empire

The final lesson of the war for the Averyn, was how difficult conquering the Gertrusi had been, and how easy it would have been to just annihilate them instead. How close they'd come to extinction themselves when the Gertrusi sent asteroids hurtling towards Avern at appreciable fractions of the speed of light. Any species that could harness the energies necessary for interstellar travel, had also harnessed the energies necessary for interstellar genocide. From the ruins they uncovered in the following years of exploration, it seemed there were plenty of species that hadn't hesitated to pull that trigger.

Someone would have to stop the cycle of destruction. The Averyn decided they would be that someone, until they were defeated or made redundant by a more responsible caretaker.

Cycles of Expansion and Development

In the centuries since their conquest of the Gertrusi, the Averyn have alternated between adding new species to their Empire and focusing on internal stability and prosperity. While the Averyn have become masterful at culturally integrating new species, every new addition presents new challenges, and one act of overreach could risk the entire Empire.

Many Averyn expansion cycles are peaceful. Not all species are as combative as the Gertrusi, and even among those that are, many encounter the staggering might of the Empire before they've established any effective means of space combat.

Catching species early in their interstellar evolution is considered imperative for the Averyn. Not only does it ensure any conflict might be decidedly one-sided, but it also guarantees 'first contact' for these emergent species is not with an equally inexperienced set of stellar travellers. Such neophyte encounters can devolve into hostilities perilously easily. Peace requires a shared language, war does not.

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IMPERIAL COURTS

The Imperial Sector Court

The highest local authority of the Empire in *Wireless Soul Transmission* was the Sector Court on Mannheim, led by Duke Trajon val Skye.

Each sector has a court, and in each resides an Imperial Duke (or Duchess, though the Averyn do not have gendered terms for nobility). The Duke is alone responsible for decisions on judicial and executive matters in his or her sector, but most maintain a court of handpicked officials to advise them. An Imperial Duke may delegate to a court member, but more frequently they will do so to someone in their line of succession (see Imperial lineage below).

Unlike planetary governments, the Sector Court holds no legislative functions (i.e., it can enforce and interpret law, but not create or change it). For this function, each Duke holds a seat at the Emperor's Court, though generally they will delegate this seat to a court member in order to maintain a local presence.

The Verdant Crest duke and his immediate family were assassinated by palace guards co-opted by the Whisper.

The Emperor's Court

The Emperor's Court, located on Avern, is the highest authority of the Averyn Empire. Here the Emperor, Recellion val Skye, leads a court of twelve Onus Holders, and twenty-three Imperial Dukes (or their representatives). By tradition, the Emperor is the direct ruler of the Concord Sector; however, this role is generally passed to a steward (popularly 'the twenty-forth Duke').

This small court is responsible for all legislation passed throughout the Empire. This limited throughput is itself an intentional safeguard against micromanaging the Empire's member states, an idea reinforced by the fact the Emperor must be found to be both attending and attentive for any legislative discussion to occur.

As its name suggests, the Emperor's Court also serves a judicial function. Should two species reach disagreement at governmental level (or even two Imperial Dukes) it is the role of the Emperor to pass final judgement.

Imperial Lineage

Each Imperial Duke, the Onus holders, and numerous other political individuals are nobility and 'members of the Imperial Family'. Despite the terminology, this family is conceptual, not ancestral, and all members are adopted. The Imperial family are expected to look out for one another as family would, guiding the young and preserving the wisdom of the old. Usually new members are adopted early in their adulthood and are groomed for leadership.

While it's technically possible for any species to demonstrate sufficient skill and character to be adopted, few non-Averyn's have ever made the cut. Humans, for example, are viewed as excellent advisors, but seen as being unable to separate their personal ambition from their duty to their subjects.

Initial selection is particularly important as a member of the Imperial Family can be relieved of an office (such as a sector duchy), but never 'removed' from the family. It is considered the family's responsibility to coach its wayward members back to the correct path, something it does foremost through diligent selection.

Any given office holder must determine their successor from other adopted family members. They are expected to be the chief mentor of their future replacements and these heirs are given significant protection due to the resources spent on their care. Established successors to a Ducal throne are referred to as Imperial Prince/Princess while in their sector, and simply as My lord/lady while visiting others. The latter is also the title for Family members who do not currently hold any office.

IMPERIAL MINISTRIES

The Empire maintains twelve ministries, though the Averyn term more closely translates to 'Onuses'. Since the Empire is purely concerned with interstellar travel and relations, there are no ministries for terrestrial developments like agriculture or mining.

Imperial Fleet Onus

The most likely Onus to appear in normal games of *Wireless Soul Transmission* is the Fleet Onus. The fleet is divided up into three branches, the Expeditionary Fleet, the Imperial Sector Fleet, and the Strategic Resource Authority. Ships and personnel can be shifted fairly freely across these branches according to the current needs of the Empire, but the current roster of warships of light cruiser weight or greater is 1,273.

The Expeditionary Fleet is the expansion force of the Empire and is generally concentrated in just one or two

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areas of the Empire. Besides supporting expansion, the Expeditionary Fleet holds the final responsibility for defence in the event that the Empire is attacked by an external power. At the time of the Shatter, this force represented a little under a quarter of the Empire's total ships, so it is perhaps for the best that these ships were outside the Sequestration area when the Whisper struck.

The Sector Fleet Branch is responsible for ensuring every sector has an adequate ratio of available fleet vessels. Once assigned, these ships serve the sector Duke until reassigned, so the Sector Fleet Branch does not directly control its assets in the way the Expeditionary Fleet does. Besides being the first line of defence for a sector, these vessels are intended to hunt smugglers and raiders and generally maintain sufficient presence to discourage any of the Empire's more militant members from trying to attack their neighbours. The Imperial Fleet contingent in the Verdant Crest are entirely elements of the local Sector Fleet, see p.60 for more on the Crest's Sector Fleet.

The Strategic Resource Authority was originally intended to ensure that deposits of critical strategic metals and other elements would remain available to the Empire in a time of crisis. Sometimes this meant making direct land purchases and developments on member worlds, other times it was simply about ensuring the local companies are sufficiently loyal and dependable. It is technically possible for the SRA to seize assets by force, but having to do so is seen as a gross failure on their behalf.

As the Empire has expanded, the Fleet has required additional shipyards and other facilities beyond those on Avern. These installations are built, maintained, and defended by the SRA.

Fleet service is voluntary enlistment based, but it is multi-species. For obvious reasons, the Empire tends to split up recruits from newer, or more militant species despite the logistical difficulties in supporting disparate species on the same ship. The Sector Fleet Branch monitors the volume of species serving in their own sectors and adjusts assignments to limit conflicts of interest.

Imperial Planetary Warfare Onus

The Planetary Warfare Onus is responsible for the defence of the Imperial Sector Worlds, including Avern, and the conquest of planets should an expansion phase require it.

The latter responsibility is handled by the Expeditionary Army. Despite the scale of the Empire, the Expeditionary Army only numbers about sixty million troops (a little over twice twenty-first century Earth's total military). Conducting planetary invasions on worlds that may have vastly different climates and terrain, and fighting foes with unique cultures and capabilities, means every conflict is a learning experience. Before each new invasion, the Expeditionary Army must be prepared to adjust, perhaps even reinvent, everything from its doctrines to its equipment and leadership styles. The larger the force, the more impractical this process becomes.

The second branch of the IPW Onus, is the Cultural Integration Service. This group works closely with the Expeditionary Army to ensure that a speedy military victory is not achieved by creating an endlessly restive populace. The CIS specialises in finding ways to convert yesterday's enemy into tomorrow's willing contributor to the Empire. Besides attempting to win over the populace, the CIS is also responsible for governing and rebuilding the world. The intention is that all worlds should reach a maturity point where CIS leadership is no longer required; however, some species require much more time than others.

The last branch of the Planetary Warfare Onus is the Averyn Guard. Intended to protect both Avern and the sector capitals, these forces are, by law, eighty percent Averyn. The most elite members of the Averyn Guard are placed in Palace Guard units responsible for directly protecting the Emperor and his Dukes.

After the Shatter, there is little of the Planetary Warfare Onus left in the Crest. The Palace Guard on Mannheim now serve the Whisper, as do the majority of the Averyn Guard. Any that would not serve were targeted relentlessly by the Whisper's forces. It is possible, of course, that some survived. It is even possible that a cadre of Expeditionary Army troopers or CIS agents were conducting exercises somewhere in the Crest when the Whisper struck.

Note that Fleet Onus warships carry a contingent of marines (called the Fleet Mobile Infantry) who specialise in boarding operations and ship defence. On the inverse, the Planetary Warfare Onus do not possess any interstellar vessels and rely on the Fleet for transportation. The Fleet Mobile Infantry are not equipped for high-intensity combat and lack the equipment and training to deal with enemy vehicles and heavy artillery.

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Imperial Communications Onus

The Communications Onus is responsible for ensuring that messages, both electronic and physical parcels, are conveyed between worlds. Most of these tasks are unlikely to be relevant to your game – suffice to say the Planar Network Development Branch does a fine job making sure there are enough planar beacons for navigation, satellites for interstellar communication, and infrastructure to get those messages to the surface.

The ICO is mentioned here because it also covers the Imperial Information Security Branch. More commonly called I-Sec, this is a large multi-species service of white-hat hackers, investigators, and network architecture experts. Their role is to make interspecies electronic warfare just as difficult as the Fleet Onus makes conventional warfare. I-Sec generally maintains an operational office on each major world to serve travelling field agents. I-Sec have broad authority to seize data and communications infrastructure for their investigations and can work with or without cooperation from the victim and other parties. These powers are tempered by strict privacy guidelines – any information an I-Sec agent uncovers that neither poses a threat to the Empire, nor directly relates to their investigation, must be returned and all copies destroyed upon completion of the investigation. Information believed to be sensitive is sealed so that it may only be viewed by the investigation team and a special expert panel at the time of a trial.

The other branch of the ICO that may be relevant is the Imperial Courier Service. Most interplanetary cargo is left to commercial carriers; however, the Empire requires that the ICO maintain a small minimum tonnage of shipping capacity between the Sector Capital and every inhabited world within their sector. Sector Capitals must likewise be linked to Avern, and this cargo space is available first-and-foremost to the Empire, but should it go unused, may be on-sold to any interested party. For this purpose, the Imperial Courier Service employs a small flotilla of fast, light cargo vessels which can operate with just a few crew.

Given the nature of the service, there would have been dozens of such vessels in the Verdant Crest when the Shatter hit. Most would have been lost in the first days, but if the players could find such a ship intact it would make an excellent vessel for their adventures.

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Imperial Honour Onus

The Imperial Honour Onus is chiefly responsible for a single group of agents, perhaps less than a thousand Empire-wide, who act as the Emperor's visible presence. These agents, called Ceradan, are meticulously chosen and extensively trained and have the power to investigate, arbitrate, and enforce with the authority of the Emperor.

Their mandate is simply to locate highly publicised issues that they believe they can resolve, and resolve them. This can be as elaborate as a decades-long dispute between two species, or as simple as catching an elusive criminal. The main skill is to never tackle anything you can't fix, since doing so dishonours the Emperor, and that is the very antithesis of a Ceradan's purpose.

The objective of these activities is to ensure that the Empire is visible as a positive force, and not just a bureaucracy. Beyond the PR benefits, this also ensures a high chance that any given world has at least one of the Empire's best agents on it at all times. Secondly, it provides the Empire itself with some grounding – any Ceradan can speak at the Imperial Court or take private audience with the Emperor. This gives a voice to the observable 'on the ground' effects of Imperial policies and makes it more difficult for any potentially scheming noble to blind the Emperor with disinformation.

Ceradan can be any species – though they have a history of being predominantly Averyn. It is easier for Ceradan to solve problems their species have already solved, hence the more advanced Imperial species are more highly represented. Equally, the Ceradan find it much easier to make a visible impact among the Empire's less evolved species, where they stand out as astonishingly smart, or strong, rather than just 'foreign'.

Ceradan doctrinally work alone, but experienced members are normally shadowed by a pair of trainees who will learn both by observing, and by taking on any less sensitive operations. Given their number, it is certain there were several dozen Ceradan in the Crest at the time of the Shatter. Whether or not the Whisper realised their significance and targeted them directly, or how many survived the Whisper's general aggression against Averyn is up to you. Regardless, any GM should take care with these agents, even a single Ceradan might well 'out-hero' the party, and you should always strive to keep your heroes at the centre of events.

Of course, one of your heroes could always secretly *be* a Ceradan.

The Other Onuses

The remaining Onuses are unlikely to have a significant impact on your campaign. While these political entities are critical to holding together the Empire, they won't have much influence on the Whisper.

THE REMAINING IMPERIAL ONUSES

ONUS	FUNCTION
Disaster Recovery	Provides assistance and supplies to colonies hit by disasters. Also includes an advisory board on providing relief funding to non-Empire species
Exploration and Development	Responsible for surveying worlds both within and beyond the Empire. Licenses the founding of new colonies and provides early colonial support.
Financial	Responsible for ensuring interstellar investment is fair and streamlined.
Judicial Coordination	Acts as an information sharing entity for interstellar criminal investigations, determines extradition and court assignments for crimes affecting multiple worlds. Maintains a court for inter-sector disputes not significant enough to involve the Emperor's Court
Science	Encourages scientific collaboration between Imperial worlds. Rules on which technologies can only be researched in controlled environments or otherwise require licensing to pursue
Tourism and Travel	Responsible for ensuring citizens of the Empire may travel freely between any Imperial worlds for legal pursuits. Works with the fleet to ensure temporary protection for worlds that are not yet ready for an influx of alien visitors.
Trade	Responsible for ensuring fair and streamlined trade between Imperial species. Regulates trade between Imperial worlds and species beyond.
Treasury	Ensures the collection of Imperial trade taxes. Prepares the Imperial budget

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THE HULGARI

The Hulgari can play as large, or as small, a role in your game as necessary. A sprinkling of Hulgari throughout a campaign can help make the universe seem more diverse and interesting, without needing to unpack any real detail about their species or its history. Alternatively, they can make a complicated ally for your heroes – their boycott of DNI technology has put them low on the Whisper's hit-list, so they have survived in a better organised and better equipped fashion. On the other hand, they blame humanity for the Whisper, and though this is assumption on their part, it remains something the players will have to overcome twice. First when they ask for the Hulgari's help, and second when it comes to light the Hulgari were right.

HULGARI HISTORY

Early History of the Hulgari

In addition to its tumultuous storms, the Hulgari homeworld was cursed with many aggressive pack predators. Despite being their planet's only intelligent life, the Hulgari were not the top of the food chain until after the invention of gunpowder. While early humans with sharpened sticks were ample to chase off a wolf pack on Earth, entire Hulgari villages were wiped out by roving packs of ferocious hyena analogues call griblims.

This brutal environment crafted the Hulgari into a naturally timorous people, but also one with a strong sense of unity. Across the tribes of the Hulgari there were many forms of leadership, but they shared a similar focus on safety over development and experimentation. While this political faction was called 'the Guardians' by historians, it was so prevalent at the time that their proper name, *Ebrian*, simply meant 'leaders'.

While Hulgari survival was thanks to the Guardians, it was the outcasts, the more progressive minds, who dragged them forward era by era. Sometime in the Hulgari's industrial era, when the griblims were finally under control, the progressives became restive. In chic new cafés and tightly-regulated universities, they noted that *they* had finally pushed back all the lethal fauna. They speculated the Hulgari alone had harnessed technology. They reasoned this meant they had a destiny that didn't include hiding. They, being the only intelligent species on their planet, were mandated by their gods to climb out of their trees and show what they were really capable of. Those who championed this progressive ideal became known as *Regil*, or 'the Diviners'.

The Hulgari Join the Empire

The Diviner ideology proved popular well beyond the ranks of the progressive thinkers. For millennia the Guardians greatest achievement had been maintaining the status quo, and their continued opposition to technology now seemed a greater obstacle to wealth and prosperity than the Griblims ever had been. By the time the Hulgari achieved their first interstellar flight, the Diviners were the dominant faction.

The Averyn decided to invite Hulgaria to the Empire in 2036. The arrival of expansionist aliens would have seen a massive political swing in favour of the Guardians, but the Averyn analysts foresaw this risk. They reasoned that the Guardians would likely be a barrier to the Hulgari peacefully integrating to the galactic community and some care would need to be taken in approaching these timid aliens.

To minimise their political impact, the Averyn made contact first with members of the Diviner faction and, in secret, established the narrative under which the Hulgari would join the Empire. The public story was that Diviner explorers had 'encountered and befriended' the Averyn as a part of exploration.

Despite this narrative, the Averyn were initially viewed with fear, but over the next couple of years continued demonstrations of shared goodwill began to calm everyone down. Privately the Diviners had signed the Imperial Subject Agreement straight away, but the 'public signing' wasn't held until much later when the public mood had settled enough to accept the idea that the Hulgari were not to become a food source for aliens (a fear highly publicised by the Guardians).

Humanity Joins the Empire

The position of the Hulgari as the most advanced species in the Verdant Crest was a coup for the Diviners. What the Empire called 'the Verdant Crest', they referred to as the Hulgari Crest. The desire to prove their status as the 'benevolent and superior race' in the sector, led to the Hulgari investing significantly in Chikyū-Ni.

At the time, the Hulgari were still in the process of surveying most of their nearby systems. Humanity, by necessity, was to conduct a far more intensive surveying

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program. Hansei, the ultimate destination of humanity, was actually far closer to Hulgaria than it was to Earth, but nonetheless it was humanity that surveyed it first.

The realisation that Chikyū-Ni would bring the humans a lot closer was unacceptable to the Guardians. Even among the Diviners, this was a problematic turn of events – this mineral rich planet with plenty of arable land and limited need for terraforming was clearly a part of the Hulgari destiny, not a lifeboat for humans. Unfortunately for the Diviners, they had already thrown substantial support behind Chikyū-Ni, and while they pressured humanity to choose a different world, they could do little without jeopardising the political majority they had tenuously maintained since joining the Empire.

The Colonisation of Joulan

The Guardians, with support from dissatisfied Diviners throughout the government, decided to claim jump. This loose coalition had access to just enough of the Hulgari's limited transport fleet, including many ships being tested for a separate colonisation effort, to move a few thousand individuals to Hansei. The colonial license the Hulgari had for a separate planet in the same approximate area was used as a smoke screen, with the Hulgari maintaining that there had been an error translating their coordinate systems to Imperial standard and that the Hulgari had been planning to colonise Joulan (their name for Hansei) all along.

Though the Averyn saw through the ruse, they weren't particularly moved to take action. The main purpose of the colonial licensing system was to ensure the fleet wouldn't be forced to defend some far-flung world. The Hulgari decision would save on bureaucracy, since humanity could now just immigrate to Hansei, instead of needing its own license. Two or more species were only prevented from homesteading on the one world if the Empire believed a fight was imminent. From the Averyn perspective, all species are Imperial citizens, all worlds are Imperial worlds.

The Guardians were aware of Imperial law, they knew that a small mining outpost wouldn't be enough to stop human migration, but they believed that, as 'planetary rulers' they could make it impossibly complex for humanity to migrate to Hansei/Joulan. In this they were at odds with their former Diviner allies, whose fates were still bound to the idea of assisting humanity. The Diviners believed they could 'out-settle' humanity without creating artificial barriers.

Unfortunately for both factions, Joulan was something of a disaster. The Hulgari had no firsthand experience with colonisation, they had left before their own program had completed testing, and in an effort to maintain secrecy, they had eschewed any outside expertise. Worse still, the Diviners and Guardians were both shipping more people onto the world as fast as they could in an attempt to outnumber the humans and maintain local numerical superiority for their faction. Joulan was to be the Hulgari's first off-world colony, and since Imperial law guaranteed it would be independently governed, each faction wanted to make sure it was their philosophy that shaped it.

The Human Colonisation Effort

The Diviner and Guardian efforts ultimately thwarted both sides. As Joulan became wracked by famine and disease, The Imperial Duke declared the colony in crisis and sent in the Exploration and Development Onus. The EDO used Averyn technology and supplies to save the colony, but they also took over interim management for twenty-four months. This gave humanity time to start moving in, something they did at both greater scale and with much greater success. Though humanity did not have any more first-hand experience than the Hulgari, they had planned extensively and employed experts from a dozen Imperial species. Perhaps most importantly, their Empire-wide fundraising had attracted more investment capital than the rushed Hulgari colonists could dream of.

Hulgari – from both factions – continued to petition the Duke for sole rulership of the planet, but it quickly became evident this would not happen. Not only was human colonisation immediately more successful, it had far outstripped the lone Hulgari settlement in size and scale. At the sector court, humanity made several offers to form coalition government, albeit with humanity getting majority say, but were rejected. Ultimately the Duke declared Joulan would have enclave status, with its local government extending to one hundred kilometres from the city centre in all directions.

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THE ANTIMATTER PLOT

The Antimatter Bomb

The Diviner faction had its origins in inventing a weapon big enough to kill native predators. While they were pragmatic in their interactions with the Averyn, the existence of space-faring super beings was not a comfort to the Hulgari. As benevolent (or at least antipathetic) as the Averyn appeared to be, the Hulgari realised they were, once more, not at the top of the food chain.

All species within the Empire eventually learn about the Imperial Fleet's Total Conversion warheads (some sooner than others). While it is both incorrect, and physically impossible, the Averyn leak misinformation that suggest the core of the device is a critical mass of antimatter. The Averyn closely regulate antimatter, both because of its potential as a terrorism weapon, and to maintain the appearance that it can be scaled up to a planet destroying super bomb.

The Diviners reasoned that a few Total Conversion weapons would sufficient to convince the Imperial Fleet to steer clear of Hulgaria if necessary. They didn't want a war with the Averyn, but they wanted to be certain they would win one.

Being from a low-gravity world, the Hulgari were able to acquire significant volumes of gravity manipulation equipment without raising the normal red flags. Over time, chosen pieces were slipped away to an unlicensed antimatter production facility in an uninhabited system designated Bowman-3-Delta. Production rates were not high, the process was new and most importantly the Hulgari didn't want to risk any large-scale energy release that might catch the Averyn's attention.

The Solution to the Human Problem

The existence of a small quantity of antimatter came up during discussions between the Guardians and the Diviners on how to deal with humanity. Neither faction believed a war was a great idea, but at the time all options were on the table.

The Diviners representatives never gave away the specific location of the facility, but the Guardians retained enough influence with the general population to eventually locate it. When it became evident that Joulan would be put under EDO control, the Guardians struck.

In early 2052, a Guardian backed strike force attacked the secret production facility and stole some five kilograms of antimatter, setting off about a gram of it in their wake to cover all evidence. The Hulgari were censured by the Duke and this, perhaps more than any publicly given reason, cemented humanity as the primary owners of Hansei.

More importantly, the Diviners did not reveal how much had been stolen – a gram of antimatter looks like an ill-conceived experiment, several kilograms is clearly a weapons program. The Diviners reasoned that if the antimatter turned up later, they could maintain it had come from a different source.

The Joulan Doomsday Shaft

While the Diviners were dealing with the fallout from the production facilities destruction, the Guardians smuggled the antimatter to Joulan. There are systems designed to detect the powerful gravity suspension fields used to contain antimatter, but for the time being the fledgling colony had none. The antimatter was placed in a section of the mine where they hoped the scans from the Averyn ships could not reach. Behind holographic rock and several layers of security doors, in a section of the mine marked both unstable and mined out, is the biggest bomb on Hansei.

But the weapon was a disappointment for the Guardians almost from the moment they acquired it. Five kilograms of antimatter annihilation would create a blast a little over a hundred megatons. Such an explosion would be impressive, but they wanted to destroy Hansei, not anger it.

Such scientists as the Guardians had access to struggled with the maths of an antimatter cascade and ultimately suggested that higher pressures could increase the chance of a cascade – probably a thermonuclear one instead of an annihilation wave, but at least something. They theorised that if it could be triggered in the lower Mantel (the Asthenosphere), it might manage to annihilate the planet or, failing that, it might be able to shatter one hemisphere, perhaps even displace the core. Or it might see little yield increase at all and make some barely noticeable tremors on the surface.

Determined to see their plan through, the Guardians waited until the EDO administration had ended, and started to dig. Though now functional, Joulan struggled under the prospect of drilling a magnetically shielded shaft three hundred kilometres deep. Some fifty years after work started, the drill project was abandoned,

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having reached only seventy kilometres down. Much like the bomb it was an impressive achievement, but magnitudes short of their intended goal.

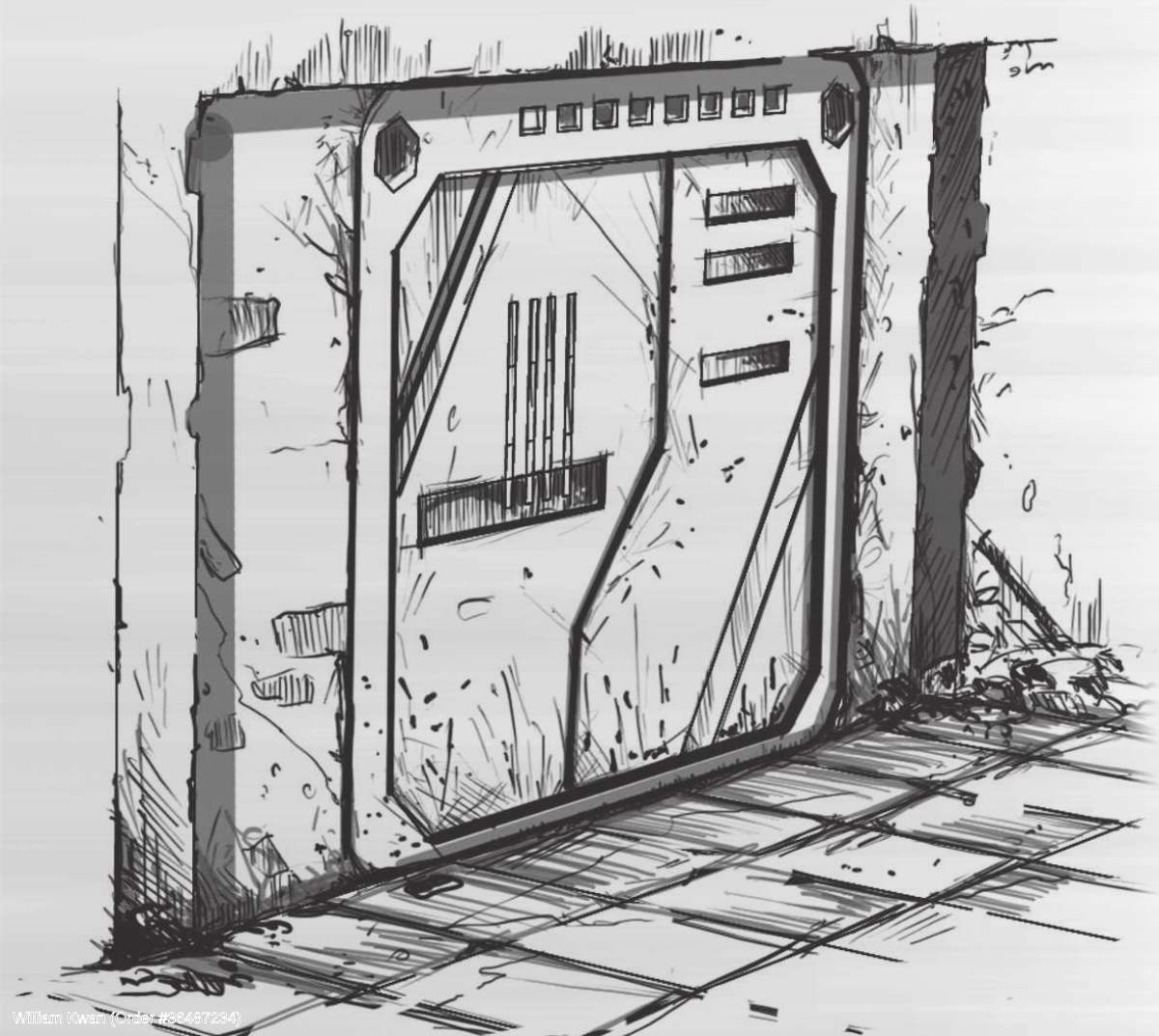
The Lingering Threat

The Antimatter Plot was never implemented, but also never technically abandoned. By 2110, there was some talk about dismantling the bomb. In sixty years, they'd never used it and, if anything, humans were helping the Guardian cause on Hulgaria. As humanity bounded ahead of the Hulgari in wealth, influence, and technology, the Diviners' promise of manifest destiny looked like less and less of a reality. As humanity expanded, they were being just intimidating enough, just uncooperative enough, that painting them as dangerous was easy. Whether they *actually* presented a realistic threat to the Hulgari homeworld was debated even among the Guardians.

Unfortunately, the only way to dispose of antimatter is through annihilation, which was what they were now trying to avoid. Moving the device off world would allow safe detonation, but Hansei wasn't the same world as when they'd move the bomb in. The Hansei defence network now had no shortage of systems for detecting gravity suspension systems like the one containing the antimatter. An experienced team might have been able to siphon off small amounts of antimatter from the field at a time, creating blasts small enough to escape detection and gradually weaning away the destructive force. Unfortunately, the device's design team had all been killed in its recovery – and seeking out antimatter experts was a guaranteed way to attract the Empire's attention.

So, for thirty-one more years, inertia prevailed, a stasis ended only by the Shatter. Currently there is no remote detonation system linked to the weapon, and even if there was, it's questionable whether the Whisper would see value in using it. Before long it might not matter, the radioisotope thermoelectric generators that power the suspension field have been depleting their fuel for almost a century now, and the redundant field arrays have burned through most of their redundancies. It's up to the GM to decide just how close to detonation this bomb might be, and what effect it would have if it did go off.

Despite its proximity to failure, the device is still a potent weapon, and somewhere, there are three Hulgari with the necessary arming keys.



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THE POST-SHATTER ECONOMY

The *Play Guide* paints the post-Shatter economy in very broad strokes, but as the GM you might find yourself in need of additional detail.

You'll tend to find your players will be mainly interested in weapons, armour, and adventuring supplies, but these things represent only a fraction of the interests of a settlement or arcology.

Arcology Interests

Arcologies need two disparate kinds of products, the very simple, and the very elaborate. Simple products, like raw steel, copper, aluminium, gold, carbon, industrial chemicals and such are necessary raw materials for the 3D printers. These materials are preferred in powder form, but all arcologies have some capacity to refactor relatively pure raw materials into useable state. More industrial focused arcologies can take salvage of almost any kind and recycle it into usable materials, consuming a car to produce raw steel, plastic, as well as trace amounts of chemicals and conductive elements.

While these simple products fulfil the day-to-day requirements of arcologies, the desire for more intricate items tends to be quite specific. Blueprints for 3D printers, rare advanced technology, and definitely anything that might be relevant to their commercial focus (such as a pre-Shatter competitor's product). As the GM, you should think about the objective of any given arcology that you've included in your game. The Itero Group are iconic in their desire to come out of the Whisper on top, and not much else, so they will not accept any old blueprint. Even a blueprint for a fantastic weapon that could stop the Whisper in its tracks would be of little interest to them. On the other hand, sitting out the Whisper has gotten tiresome for the Itero family at the tip of the pyramid, so unusual luxury and entertainment goods would be of definite interest.

Always keep in mind that the arcologies are largely self-sufficient, which is why they only trade during the arkets. Knocking on the door with some product, however fantastic, is not likely to earn you entry. The arcologies have wants, not needs, and they can trade in their own time and on their own terms.

Settlement Interests

As established in the *Play Guide*, most settlements are extremely focused on survival, but you shouldn't get caught up in thinking this always means combat. More than firearms, they need protatoes (or starch packets), vitamins, antibiotics, flashlights, demolition tools (not just explosives but things like hammers and crowbars), salvage tools, 'dumb' communicators (like walkie-talkies), water filters, power cells, survival knives. Entertainment products can also be critical – anything from pre-Shatter toys to moonshine are day-to-day necessities to keep settlements from imploding under the stresses inflicted by the Whisper.

Settlements are built on repurposed systems, cobbled together and maintained by often questionable mechanics. The ingenuity of the survivors can solve a lot of problems, but the importance of certain critical parts is paramount, and sometimes these parts can only come from the arcologies. Other times finding one obscure piece of machinery in a city fraught with dangers will be well beyond the capabilities of the basic scavenger. Canny settlements will attempt to stockpile at least a couple of such components. If the water filter breaks and there are no replacements, settlements will be willing to pay a high price indeed for a replacement.

Technical manuals and other learning materials are another extremely valuable item for the settlements. Between the rarity of safe data sources and the necessity of upskilling their meagre technical staff, most settlements will pay big money for relevant materials.

Particularly successful settlements will also purchase the occasional luxury item such as synthetic chocolate, vat grown steak, or on very rare occasions real, verifiable meat that didn't come from vermin.

Mercenary Interests

The mercenary scavengers will have the most in common with the players. Certainly, they need many of the things the settlers do (food, medicine and survival tools), but they're also always on the lookout for more powerful weapons, replacement body armour, and so on. Securing safe-houses is also a high priority for the average mercenary, so they'll be interested in motion sensors, alarms, ready-made traps, explosives, locking equipment and anything else that might keep their belongings safe while they're out, and their hides intact while they're sleeping.

Despite the beliefs of some disconnected, the augmented are not machines, and they too require

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entertainment. Their nomadic lifestyles see them favouring lightweight and portable diversions, entertainment software and films.

Who's trading with whom

Basic scavengers from the settlements will provide a lot of the arcology simple interests. Even after so long, it is not difficult to find decent salvageable metals and chemicals. Some settlements operate small-scale refineries; some have even salvaged untainted recyclers, which give them a powerful edge at the arkets.

When a settlement needs an advanced part, it will go to an arket if time allows. Otherwise they will generally put up a bounty for the part at the various wired bars. For rare parts, mercenaries will frequently negotiate up from the posted rate, though this can backfire if another mercenary turns up with the same part.

Between arkets, both settlements and mercenaries will stockpile items they believe will have value to the arcologies. Usually a few weeks in advance of an arket, the arcologies will post their own bounties in the wired bars and settlements, leading to a mad scramble to turn up these 'sure sellers'.

Settlements will also trade with one another. Most commonly these exchanges are made at the arket, but it is not unknown for a few scavengers to make the trip to a neighbouring settlement for trade. These trades tend to involve reusable items, like tools and manuals, and often see a one-for-one exchange without any money exchanging hands. Particularly friendly settlements will even loan items, and skilled assistance to one another.

The trade of services in general should not be overlooked. Skilled doctors, cyberneticists, technicians, electricians, and more are rare among the settlements. One of the most valuable (and therefore pricy) purchases at the arkets is one-on-one time with a trained arcology specialist, often with the goal of fixing a particular machine or item.

Not all augmented mercenaries are soldiers and scavengers either. It's important to remember that most university educated specialists were also augmented. Some travelling mercenaries are doctors, or engineers who provide their services in between the arkets.

Trading beyond Aratayo

Once the players leave home, they're still going to want to trade. At this point we recommend that, for simplicity, you continue using yen, but in a more abstract way. Rather than representing any kind of hard currency, it can represent the total worth of easily tradeable baubles the players brought with them before they left home. These items allow them to 'plug in' to whatever economy exists on the worlds they visit.

It's fair to assume that most worlds have something similar to the arket/settlement/mercenary trading structure. Not every city or world may have arcologies, but the Whisper always makes a point of leaving *some* ideal area for the oppressed classes to focus on. On some worlds, the arcologies may be played by unusually powerful settlements who seem 'blessed' by the Whisper but are punished if they try to share that blessing or actively oppose the Whisper.

You can, of course, decide that a planet has a completely different economic structure setup, but keep in mind it will take the players time to learn such a thing. If your group is interested in the details of the post-apocalypse than this will go over well. On the other hand, a combat-focused group will probably find such a diversion tedious. As with all things, know your players, and adjust your plans accordingly.

POST-WHISPER COMMUNICATION

The Play Guide is intentionally vague about the range of com beads and DNI communicators. This gives you, as GM, some options as to how difficult you want to make electronic communication for your campaign. We do have the following recommendations:

- Player Characters are always in contact: So long as your players are in roughly the same neighbourhood we recommend letting them communicate freely. It encourages fun planning and limits the differences between player knowledge and character knowledge.
- Cities are always isolated: The Whisper generally doesn't let survivors in, or out, of the cities. It stands to reason it also blocks any communication across that threshold.
- Settlements use long coms: This allows settlements to send short scheduled messages, but in general they must rely on messengers.
- Corporations only talk to their staff: Zaibatsu agents have communicators that the Whisper doesn't interfer with but in order to avoid exposing their 'clean' networks to the Whsiper, the arcologies will only communicate with their own agents in the field.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

PALIGAR EXPEDITION LOG

Personal log system provided by Woodpile
User: F. Orikasa

Day 1: Arrive, setup.

Day 2: Meetings with the SLC expedition leads about the nature of the Paligar civilisation. They've been working closely with a 'Preserver Silas' who works for the local priesthood and paints a fairly rosy picture of their civilisation. Since they can pass for Paligar, some Calino were allowed an expedition into a nearby city under church escort. According to the expedition reports people met their escort with a healthy measure of fear. SLC theorises that the theocracy might not be as benign as Silas claimed.

Day 14: Two weeks of inquiries and entreaties through official channels have been met with everything from ignoring us to obliquely threatening us. Silas was quick to dismiss Olicia's pages as complete fiction. This is unlikely since so many of the elements match our own work – a pre-stellar fiction writer isn't going to correctly guess how to describe a neural bridge or a crystal data-matrix.

Day 16: Trying to get authorisation to at least visit some sites around the planet but the Preserver is pushing back pretty hard. The SLC team has slightly more access than we do but they've stopped cooperating too. I've sent an email to head office to see if there's any leverage we have on the university we can use.

Day 18: This morning Doctor Effinson confessed that he'd visited the local city without permission. He made contact with a Paligar called Jeveroth who he claims is some kind of anti-theocratic activist.
Kal will have to answer for this breach in discipline, but for now he's the first one to turn up results since we got here. We now know that Olicia's scans are of a book called '*In Defiance of the Martyr*", basically a treatise against the Paligar's most esteemed religious figure. I'm not surprised our local handler was unimpressed that we were waving images of it in his face.
We now have a few more pages to look at and an alleged location of the rest. There is a 'forbidden library' atop one of the local mountains. I'm certain Preserver Silas will oppose any visit, so we might head up there directly. I suspect a librarian will be easier to talk our way past than a religious bureaucrat.

[Last Entry - Initiate DNI uplink to create new entry]

AWETECH-0

William Kwan (Quoc - 3618/231)

LANGUAGE

Just on Earth there were over six thousand languages when the Averyn found us (give or take several thousand depending on what you call a dialect and what you call a language). While many alien species do not have the same diversity as humanity, all of the thirty-plus other species of the Empire have added at least another couple of thousand languages to the pile.

How much you want this to play a part in your game is up to you, but you should consider whether linguistic challenges are likely to be enjoyed by your group. Having to specifically stipulate that you get a translator out and applying disadvantage on translated conversation checks might sound like more fun than it is in practice.

If you do want language to be an important component of your game, the below is a useful primer on language in the universe of *Wireless Soul Transmission*.

The Language of Hansei

The scale of coordination and construction on Hansei, along with its relative distance from Earth, led to the creation of an all new language. Formally the language is called 'Han', it is also colloquially referred to as 'Han-say'.

Like English, Han had no formal controlling body and is a menagerie of English, Japanese, Spanish, Mandarin, Hindi, Korean and Norwegian, with a few words from hundreds of other languages thrown in for good measure. The language has few words of its own, and these tend to concern concepts that had not yet been encountered when the Averyn reached Earth. Across Hansei, many variants exist, usually involving more, or less, of one of the parent languages, but as a rule, anyone who speaks Han can converse without too much difficulty.

Despite its name, Han is not universally spoken on Hansei. In 2110, it was adopted as the official language and is now taught in schools, so anyone under thirty-seven at the time the game begins will be fluent. Older citizens have about a fifty percent chance of fluency, with about sixty percent of the remainder speaking at least some words. Individuals in positions of power, or in trading professions, are more likely to be fluent, while those engaged in jobs that involve less public contact may well not understand a single word.

Han has spread to many of the other human colonies, and it is even spoken by aliens who trade heavily with humanity. It is noteworthy that very few Earth natives speak Han.

Real-time Translation

Even pre-stellar humanity was making great strides towards real-time translation software, so it surprised no one to discover that the Averyn had long ago solved this particular problem. Almost any electronic device could be paired with translation software that could hear one language and echo the translation. Such software, like native speakers, uses context to make its best guess at appropriate translation for words with multiple meanings. More expensive versions can also translate non-verbal cues, converting an aliens tonal change into an equivalent human one and even signalling gestures with icons.

The advent of the DNI had a profound impact on translation, as it did most other things. Translation no longer had to 'echo' the speaker's words in another language, the DNI could simply intercept the heard signal from the ears and translate it before passing it on to the brain. Likewise, visual cues could be translated in the same way, giving the user the impression that the other party is communicating to them in a language they know.

This technology pioneered in augmented reality systems. Advertisements (and marketing companies were the first to invest in the technology) would appear to each viewer in the most appropriate language. Before long, this so-called 'Babel-text' would be almost universal.

Since the language and non-verbal communication databases for the Empire's nearly one hundred thousand languages would take up a prodigious amount of space, almost all translation systems utilise cloud storage. During the Shatter, these systems became corrupted by the Wireless Whisper, and using translators became a suddenly perilous venture.

Like most tainted data, intact translation dictionaries are extremely valuable. While mercenaries keep an eye out for hard copies, Wiredivers plumb the networks, often assembling a single workable dictionary from fragments of unusable data.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

The Language of the Empire

The Averyn consolidated their languages before they achieved stellar flight. The Averyn homeworld had been broadly united since they reached the highly networked information age, and at this time the Global Communications Onus (GCO) was given responsibility for ensuring their entire world could communicate.

Rather than electing a singular language, which the GCO felt would have been culturally destructive, the Averyn spent several years dividing the vast majority of words into two languages. 'Simple Speech' was designed for clarity and ease of learning, and it would be taught to every Averyn child from then on. 'Philosophical Speech' was a far larger language, incorporating words from every language the Averyn had spoken with attention to nuanced differences and connotations. All Averyn are taught some Philosophical Speech, but it is considered optional except to those who intend to enter cultural professions (artists and philosophers, but also political figures and entertainers). In truth, very few Averyn ever learn *all* of Philosophical Speech, the language is huge (over a hundred million words) and natural evolution means there are vast swaths of words known by so few speakers as to make their use, even for the sake of exacting nuance, of questionable value.

It might be expected that Averyn Simple Speech would be an almost universal language in the Empire, and it is certainly the most widely spoken. Besides the obvious political significance, anyone who enlists in the Imperial Fleet Onus will learn Simple Speech in the first weeks of training. That said, all Averyn have to learn at least one alien language as part of their basic schooling, by the time most people have learnt one language, the average Averyn knows at least three (even if their vocabulary in Philosophical Speech might be incomplete). In general, Averyn find it easier to learn the language of the people they must deal with than the other way around.

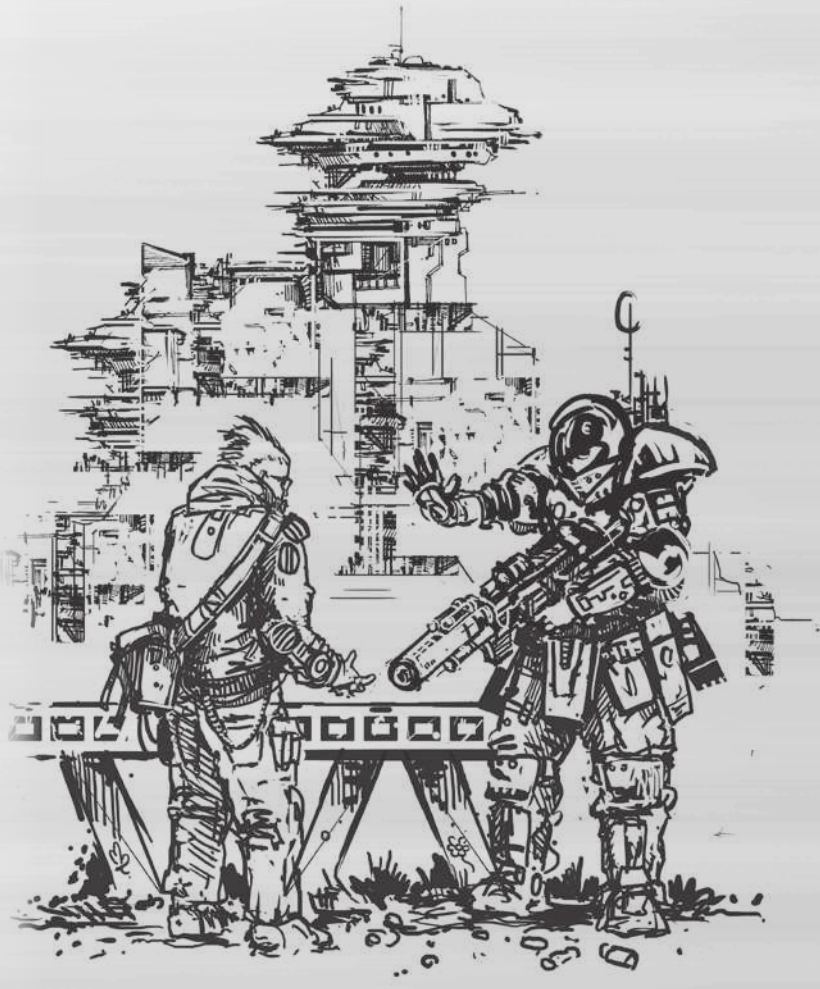
Certainly, most diplomats and members of the Imperial Court make a point of learning simple speech, some even make forays into Philosophical Speech, but the average trader or spacefarer is much more likely to rely on their translator and the Hundred Gestures.

The Hundred Gestures

Finding a common language between disparate species can be extremely difficult. While most creatures in the Empire can vocalise in some manner, finding a set of syllables all sapiens can annunciate is almost impossible. The Imperial Communications Onus (the successor of the GCO) tried numerous solutions over the years, but the most widely accepted were the Hundred Gestures.

The Hundred Gestures were intended to cover basic, and critical communication without relying on syllables. The Gestures rely on the fact that all spacefaring species have at least two digits, one of which is opposable. The most urgent of the gestures (stop, help, etc.) involve simply holding the hand in a specific way. Less urgent communications are achieved as much through the path traced by the entire hand, as by the way the digits themselves are posed.

The gestures were predominantly designed to enable trade, but also cooperation between spacefarers and authorities. So, while one can indicate something they would like to buy, or ask where the toilet is, they can equally request or offer assistance and specify whether an issue is medical, technical, or enforcement related.



William Kwan (Onus - 3618/234)

One can request a surrender, or offer one, indicate prohibited areas or items and issue ultimatums involving arrest or deadly force.

Most spacefarers are familiar with the Hundred Gestures; it takes very little time to learn them and in the event of a translator failure they can be lifesaving. Most traders, and hospitality workers in tourist hubs, know at least some of the Hundred Gestures.

In game terms, you should allow the Hundred Gestures to be suitable for any interaction that doesn't require a social check.

Using Language in your Game

If you do wish to use language in your game, we recommend focusing on the positive, rather than negative aspects of it. People *like* foreigners that put in the effort to learn their language, so don't be afraid to give advantage to conversation checks for speaking the native language of someone you're dealing with. However, be conservative about applying disadvantage on conversation checks where no common language exists.

When dealing with an absence of common language, it is often far better to focus on the difficulty of understanding than the strength of message. Weigh the players' success or failure on their ability to come up with appropriate charades or other clever ways of superseding the language barrier. If a conversation check must absolutely be required, and complex language would be required, you might be better off ruling that the players will need to find a translator to proceed. This can then kick off an adventure in finding untainted software and a library that will serve their needs. Finding a particularly accurate library could even net them some advantage in the final negotiations.

Civilised lore checks can be used to determine whether a character might know a language, though you should only allow each player to speak two or three languages (not counting the Hundred Gestures). This is doubly true if your group are going to be extensively confronting the language barrier, one character should not become the constant voice of the party simply because they are multi-lingual.

As a final tool, the below table provides some recommendations on the languages a given origin is likely to know.

ORIGIN	LANGUAGE
AUGMENTED	
Debutant	Han
Experimental	Han
War veteran	Han, Simple Speech, Hundred Gestures
Obsolete	Han
DISCONNECTED	
Disaugmented	Han, Hundred Gestures, maybe Simple Speech
Sole survivor	Han, Hundred Gestures, at least one alien language
Whisper Orphan	Han
The Woodsman	Han
GINBUSHI	
Ebonsnow	Han, Simple Speech
Yuki-onna	Han, Norwegian
Stillwater	Han, Japanese
Whiteblade	Han, Korean
NETWORK GHOST	
Agent for Hire	Han, Hundred Gestures, Simple Speech
Imperial Agent	Han, Hundred Gestures, Simple Speech
Machine Hunter	Han
Pariah	Han, Hundred Gestures
SYSTEM GUARDIAN	
Guardian of the People	Han
The Metallurgist	Han, Hundred Gestures, Simple Speech
Saviour en Route	Han, English
The Wireless Druid	Han

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ALLIES AGAINST THE WHISPER

The Whisper cannot be beaten by mortals alone. A Whisper aspect can override any IC defence without noticeable effort. The only reason there are any connected left with intact minds is because they're more valuable to the Whisper as cattle than as thralls. A party of heroes that manages to prove a legitimate threat to the Whisper will quickly find that it can hit their IC defences with modifiers of +50 or +100 or $+1.75 \times 10^{12}$, depending on how much of its resources it wants to spend.

Fortunately, the players aren't alone in their quest against the Whisper.

AI LEVEL ADAPTIVE FIREWALLS

This is a catchall term for the only grade of defence sufficient to level the playing field against the Whisper. The Whisper can still make attacks on the players, but it is constrained to do so using more reasonable modifiers (+12 or less).

Getting a defence like this is a critical shift for your players, and your campaign. Instead of just trying to survive, the heroes can now launch direct attacks versus the Whisper's most important assets and have a chance of victory.

THE FRAGMENTS OF DOCTOR ORIKASA

When Doctor Orikasa realised the magnitude of what had been unleashed, she made the bold decision to digitise her own consciousness. For a while she led the battle against the Whisper, and with her aid, the Imperial Fleet was able to tether and destroy one of the Paligar Aspects.

Unfortunately, this attracted the full attention of the other two aspects and they crushed Orikasa and scattered her fleet. On the threshold of annihilation, she split herself into fragments – 'faking' her death in the hope her components would be recovered.

If the players recover even one of these fragments, it will provide them with an AI level adaptive firewall. If they can recover them all, Orikasa can reassemble herself and become an invaluable ally. Not only does she know the full history behind the Shatter, she is also the only being to have tethered an aspect.

THE PROVIDENCE AI

Though it has no history with the Whisper, the Providence AI provides a worthy alternative to Doctor Orikasa.

Producing an artificial intelligence has proved much more difficult than was estimated in the twentieth century. The gap between 'expert system' and 'creative' is vast, and it has not been reduced by significant Imperial controls over AI research.

The Providence AI project is located in a secret lab contained within the mantle of an otherwise barren world in the Raptor-7-Alpha System. Powerful magnetic screens keep the lava at bay and are designed to fail if the AI is in danger of getting loose. The entire facility is intentionally isolated from the Imperial Communications Network and is one of the few locations that has not felt the effects of the Whisper.

The Whisper knows of the facility, however; but it has no reason to believe Project Providence has been successful. For now, it's content to let the facility whither on the vine, but it is alert to indications that someone might be trying to go there, and such an expedition will definitely have to contend with ships sent by the Whisper.

Providence is a fully self-aware AI, and while its controllers suspect what they have created, they had many tests left before it was ready to be revealed to the world. The AI itself is very immature; its cognitive powers are immense, but it's been exposed only to very limited stimulus, which makes it very naïve about the world beyond its walls. As the only one of its kind, it is still uncertain what 'its kind' are and what its purpose should be. It recognises its creators as friends and guardians but does not invest in them any particular authority for being its creators. It is aware of the proverbial gun to its head and does not resent it, but it also does not understand why it is viewed as dangerous. Providence was programmed with a deep aversion to duplicity (another safety measure) and this had the side effect of making it stubbornly literal.

Providence can help, but it will be up to the heroes to convince it that it *should* help. Once exposed to the details, it will take the AI about a microsecond to realise the Whisper is closer to 'its kind' than the humans are.

If the heroes are to recover Providence they'll need to act fast, time is running out for the team here. The facility is not self-sufficient, has no means to reach the

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outside world, and after six years without resupply the research team won't last much longer. When they die there will be no one left to send keep-alive commands to the magnetic field, and the AI will be destroyed

AN ASCENDED PLAYER

One option to surprise your players is to offer ascension to the heroes as a means of fighting the Whisper on equal terms. In the Appendix I (see p. 286) you will find rules for converting a player character to an ascended intelligence. Some considerations should be kept when doing this.

1. The ascended player will have such a different way of interacting with the world that, after the initial 'wow' factor wears off, they may feel like they're playing a completely different game. Their inability to touch things directly may lead to them feeling like they exist to support the players' adventures. Equally the players may feel like the ascended player, with all their digital powers, is the real hero and they're just being given busy-work.

   The best way to deal with this is not to introduce this possibility until very late in the campaign. This provides maximum impact, with minimum risk. Of course, if you know your players well and think it will fly, you could experiment with an ascended from the beginning.

2. Have a backup plan if none of your players *want* to ascend. It's okay to phrase it as 'our only hope' in the game narration, but in the real world you should make sure the player understands this is a choice and there is an alternative. The change is sufficiently drastic that you should not force it on anyone.

THE PATRON

This being (or perhaps beings, no one is certain) has been called many things, the Curator, the Guardian, the Star Dragon, the Preservationist or sometimes just the Entity. It is easily as old and mysterious as the Whisper, and while its origins and intentions are just as elusive, its actions have always been benign. Unlike the Whisper, it will communicate with us, but cannot be compelled to reveal more than it will.

The Patron's powers seem limitless from our perspective. Without evident use of technology, it appears able to travel instantaneously (or at least invisibly) and can create or transform matter and energy. It is either extremely insightful or able to read thoughts, and its ability to show up at critical junctures suggests a degree of omniscience. No one has ever risked attacking the Patron, so it is unclear whether or not it is vulnerable to conventional harm.

Still, its actions suggest the Patron tends to prefer to guide the younger races to solutions, rather than simply removing obstructions. It does not appear to favour any particular species, but it won't assist with politics of oppression or war. By that nature, it has sometimes worked for the Empire and sometimes against it.

It is never clear when the Patron will appear, sometimes it will intervene in an apparently trivial matter, other times it will overlook a disaster spanning a dozen systems. Perhaps it is busy elsewhere, or perhaps it has some degree of prescience and knows better than we which events will really unmake us. The only known pattern is that the Patron reliably shows up when a younger race stumbles upon something ancient and dangerous enough to threaten all civilisation. The Lydraxi Plague, the Von Neumann Machine, and the Great Dark were all driven back after assistance from the Patron.

So it is with the Whisper. Though most within the Verdant Crest are unaware of it, the Patron has isolated the entire region from the rest of the universe. From the outside, signals that should enter the Verdant Crest seem to 'skip' over it. From within space has curved oddly and travelling to the 'edge' will actually cause one to warp back around.

In the six years so far, this is the only help we've received. It may be that the Patron is again waiting to see what we can do, or it may be the Whisper represents an entity even the Patron has no simple answer to.

DEUS EX MACHINA

The Patron should be used very sparingly. Any use of its abilities to 'magic' problems away will be cliché and, more importantly, will make the players feel superfluous. Its role in the universe should be to demonstrate that, just as there are ancient evils like the Whisper, there is also ancient good in the galaxy.

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OOTORI SYNDICATE – HEAD OFFICE DIVISION

MEETING AUTO-TRANSCRIPT 2123-03-16 REF # 70245681
18:46_SECT_EXCERPT BEGINS

KEVYN ACEBRIDGE (CHIEF LEGAL ADVISOR) – My team have just finished going over the draft of the Imperial Samurai Act and there's some good news and some bad news. Preference?

ASTANZIA OOTORI (CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER) – Good news first please, it's been a long day.

KEVYN ACEBRIDGE – Well the basics are all there. For every three Ginbushi any of the Zaibatsu train, a forth must be given over to the Empire for a new 'Ebonsnow' clan. In return our ginbushi can carry military armaments and augmentations.

CONSTANCE SOKOLOV (SECURITY CONSULTANT) – That means these ebonsnow will outnumber any one corporation seven... nearly eight to one.

ASTANZIA OOTORI – That's fine, I'm not planning to go to war with the Empire. What about the warship provision?

KEVYN ACEBRIDGE – Granted. Total hull weight is limited according to the corporations total stock value. Most of the zaibatsu, including us, should be able to field at least one decent cruiser and some assault ships.

CONSTANCE SOKOLOV – I can't believe the Averyn let that slide.

ASTANZIA OOTORI – Indeed. I feel like the bad news is going to be extremely bad.

KEVYN ACEBRIDGE – Possibly ma'am: the Empire retains the ability to call up any and all members of the ginbushi clans in a time of crisis.

ASTANZIA OOTORI – Conscription?

KEVYN ACEBRIDGE – Not exactly. Imperial Law doesn't currently allow conscription, but it also doesn't allow private companies to have warships. They got around both in the same way... you see we haven't been granted authorisation to raise a private army, we've been granted right to train and maintain a military reserve for the Empire.

ASTANZIA OOTORI – Bloody Averyn. It's like dealing with a disingenuous genie.

KEVYN ACEBRIDGE – Yes ma'am.

18:51_SECT_EXCERPT ENDS

AWETECH-0

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THE IMPERIAL FLEET

Orikasa's decision to digitise her consciousness, and the speed with which she did so, was not a part of the Whisper's plans. As a result, almost half of the Imperial fleet, including both flagships, were reclaimed almost before they fell to the Whisper. In the twelve months that followed, they fought the Whisper several times, gathering resources, and more importantly, intelligence on their enemy's nature.

In 2142, when Orikasa destroyed one of the aspects in the Gitelman System, the remaining two aspects turned on her fleet. While she was fragmented, she was able to leave enough protection that even the combined efforts of the Whisper could not seize all of the fleet. Even then, many ships on both sides were destroyed, including the flagship *Rustung der Kostenlos*, before contact could be broken.

Following the battle, the Imperial fleet fell under command of an Ebonsnow Shōgun called Sora Kishi aboard the *Schwert von Skye*. For another four years, the fleet tried to fight the Whisper. They tried to avoid large scale engagements, both because of the cost, and because there was little to be gained in defeating the Whisper militarily. In 2346 the fleet slipped back to the Gitelman system and is now hiding amid the wreckage of the battle, uncertain what to do next.

In total, the remaining fleet consists of one flagship, four patrol cruisers, three battlecruisers, a dozen light cruisers and numerous supply and support vessels. This represents approximately a third of the strength of the ships in the Whisper's control.

If the heroes can convince this fleet to return to the fight, they'll have a powerful ally versus the Whisper's conventional forces.

THE GINBUSHI FLEET

Strictly speaking, corporations were forbidden from possessing their own ships, but as in many things, the ginbushi clans enjoyed a special status. Unlike the Imperial fleet, the ginbushi are not united, and there is no singular corporate battlegroup. Even minor clans own at least a couple of assault ships, and the major clans usually possess a single capital ship, all of which have powerfully discouraged war profiteering during troubled times.

After the Shatter, most of the clan ships are currently on standby in hidden facilities, waiting for the day the Whisper challenges their arcology and fully expecting to go out in a blaze of glory versus impossible odds. What the crews lack in experience, they make up for with nano-augmentation and an unflinching commitment to duty.

Convincing corporations to part with their guardians, or the ginbushi to part with their masters, will be a daunting exercise, but a handful of powerful ships, and more importantly the elite ground troops aboard them, could make the difference between victory and annihilation.

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UNTANGLING THE RUMOURS

Throughout the *Play Guide* we mention numerous rumours, and we certainly encourage you to come up with some of your own as the players explore the post-Shatter world. Because the Whisper can seem so random in its behaviours, people have become extremely superstitious. Ideas that would seem insane, like only searching for water during weekdays to avoid berserkers, will appear to hold up to observation for the survivors.

As with most superstitions, many are a simple matter of coincidence. Below we expand on the truth behind the rumours included in the *Play Guide*.

A Ship in Rōdō-sha

It is rumoured that a ship crashed in Rōdō-sha in 2141, but no one has been able to find it. This rumour is true.

The ship was an assault ship belonging to the Hansei Planetary Defence Force. The Shatter killed all of the crew except for two disconnected who prudently elected to set the ship down. Because they didn't dare use communication, the survivors were concerned that any attempt to land at the space port would see them shot down.

Instead they activated the emergency beacon and targeted a disused landing pad in Rōdō-sha. At the time, the pad was a market square and there was no shortage of witnesses to spread the rumour. The ruin caused to the market stalls gave birth to the idea it had 'crashed'.

The two survivors both attempted to rejoin the PDF. One was later killed by berserkers, but the other, Specialist Dianna Maye, is still alive. She has sold the location of the ship several times, though she is just one of several people doing so and, like the others, the information she's selling no longer has any value.

Shortly after it crashed, the Bleeding Crane claimed the ship for themselves. Their original plan was to flee Hansei, but their pilot warned against using the vessel until they could find a way to 'jam' the Whisper.

In order to secure the vessel in the meantime, the Crane uncovered the colonial-era mechanism that caused the pad to recede into an underground hangar. By the time the players arrive on the scene, the Bleeding Cranes successors, the Furui Kiga, now guard this secret. They have established a sprawling market of their own on the blast doors that have sealed above the hangar. Between ramshackle stalls and salvaged carpets, the majority of the doors are now covered from any canny observer. While they encourage plenty of visitors to the market, they also patrol the area to catch any wandering explorers who might find the tenement basement that accesses the hangar.

Coleman Docks

This thousand-strong settlement believe that, so long as no one passes beyond the last line of shipping containers, the Whisper cannot see them. Leaving the settlement must be done exclusively through an underground service tunnel.

As written, this rumour is untrue. The Whisper knows exactly where they are and holds them under siege for reasons of its own. It might be that it heightens the tension of the population, it might be an initial instruction that was given to the presiding suzerain and never overturned.

That suzerain, the Ferryman, commands a large contingent of berserkers, made more dangerous by the prevalence of strength augmentations among dockworkers. This group invariably ambushes anyone attempting to leave (though they'll usually avoid people arriving). Should anyone attempt to escape by sea, the Ferryman commands her forces from a hydrofoil and will run down and board any ship leaving the area.

The underground route is known to the Whisper, but the suzerain's instructions do not extend to securing it. Most likely this is because the Whispers objectives do not extend to wiping out all survivors.

Nine-tail Shrine

Two hundred and fifty survivors at the Inari Okami shrine believe that *ofuda* (stone fox statues) surrounding the property cannot be crossed by the Whisper's agents.

This rumour is not true, the settlement is effectively defenceless, and the Whisper could destroy it with almost no effort.

The Chosen

Two hundred individuals living on the outskirts of the fusion reactor believe that the Whisper is divided into different clans. They believe that the clan which controls the power plant has chosen them, and as a result, they are protected from other Whisper clans by the one operating the power plant.

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This rumour is false, and head of the Chosen's Council, Coljack, knows it. Their settlement survives because all of the berserkers in the immediate region were drawn into the plant for the initial attack and have remained there since. The only threats in the area are the occasional bands that wander in from surrounding areas. If these draw too close to the suzerain that commands the plant, it often takes control and adds them to its garrison (but there are definitely no clans, and Whispered forces never fight one another).

Coljack believes the story of the Chosen was the only way to convince people to stay in the relatively safe place so close to a large and dangerous group of berserkers.

Anita Ryan – The Last I-Sec Officer

The Imperial Information Security Branch, more commonly called I-Sec was originally responsible for preventing electronic warfare between interstellar bodies. Given that many survivors believe the Whisper to be an intentional attack from some government or another, I-Sec is the logical government office to turn to.

Unfortunately, I-Sec has always maintained a fairly low profile, and what public offices they had were wiped out in the days following the Shatter. In 2144, the name Anita Ryan started appearing as the alleged last Hansei I-Sec officer.

This rumour is true, or at least Anita Ryan is both alive and an I-Sec operative. Whether or not she's the last is best decided by yourself. Anita Ryan is running on the trail of the Orikasa fragments, which can make her an ideal ally or guide for the players. You can find her full background, as well as a stat block on p. 140.

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The Keevan

There is a rumour of a settlement in the city's northwest that practices blood sacrifice to appease the Whisper. Most augmented avoid the whole area in the event that the rumour is true.

Unfortunately, this rumour *is* true. A surprisingly large group of connected are bound together in a rare settlement. Every month they sacrifice 'the most augmented' by chaining them to a pylon on a raft and sending it down the Gagarin river. Though the connected don't fully understand this, the sacrifice does work, drawing off collectors and often a group of berserkers or two that will follow the larger machines around.

Since all of the Keevan left now have just the basic DNI, the decision of who will be sacrificed has become contentious and often political rather than objective. Fortunately, the 'most augmented' doesn't have to be a local, and this makes the Keevan extremely friendly to augmented guests, generally aiming to convince them to stay until the time of the next sacrifice.

If challenged about the rumour, the Keevan will claim that they breed goats for sacrificial purposes. While they don't feel good about spilling a goat's blood, or even particularly understand why it keeps the Whisper at bay, their villages endurance speaks for itself.

The Puppeteer

The Puppeteer is allegedly a female network ghost who takes control of augmented scavengers when they're about to be killed by small groups of lost. She manipulates them to defeat their attackers and then lets them go before disappearing into the night.

The Puppeteer is real – though nearly half of all actions attributed to her are either embellished or entirely fictional. She is not a crusader, as some might suppose, but she does believe that many augmented allow themselves to be torn apart simply because they underestimate their own capabilities. Despite the damage they've caused, she believes the augmented are the *true* humans and the disconnected are cowards who hide behind them.

The Drone King

The Drone King is a story about an individual who survives by working in concert with some dozens (or hundreds depending on the teller) of drones. The legend tells the first drone believed it was the Drone King's son.

We recommend that you select your *truth* from the below, depending on the tone you want to set for your campaign.

- If you'd like a very fatalistic tone, the drones should turn on the Drone King. Depending on your needs, this can happen before, or after, the players encounter him and so they may just be finding his remains surrounded by angry drones.

  Ultimately there was nothing special about the drones, and their turning had only ever been a matter of time.

- For a sombre campaign arc, the players should meet the Drone King at the end of his life. His drones, still loyal, are numerous and have developed a kind of 'hive sentience' where only one can be intelligent at a time. This has allowed them to hold off the Whisper so far, but now they're struggling to understand the Great Father's imminent passing.

  If the players arrive late, they may find the drones conducting a funeral or vigil in honour of their dead lord, having salvaged a crown from a museum for the occasion.

  Depending on how the players have come by the Drone King, it may be appropriate for one of the heroes to take his place, or for the drone which first believed it was the king's son to take his father's place. Either way, the drones might serve as a future ally or even inspiration for a similar 'group defence' that might help protect connected without needing an Orikasa fragment or similar.

- A coldly realist campaign could find the Drone King a stubbornly optimistic old man with a far smaller number of drones than the stories tell. The drones have no special defence versus the Whisper, and the so-called Drone King is under no illusion that they won't someday turn on him. He is philosophical that he is too old to survive without them, and when his time comes, it comes.

  None of the drones have any particular personality, they are simply various machines reprogrammed by a skilled roboticist to help him find food and other critical supplies.

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ADDITIONAL RUMOURS

Besides those in the *Play Guide*, we encourage you to throw other rumours at the players during your games. In such a high-stress environment, gossip, hope, and outright superstition have inevitably blurred into a tide of hearsay, speculation and 'accepted facts'.

We've included a few extra rumours below for you to use as you feel necessary. Some you might have seen alluded to elsewhere in this book.

Collectors can't cross running water

A false rumour of unclear origins. Many survivors swear that collectors cannot cross water, either because it disrupts their electronics or because their programming prohibits it.

In some stories the water has to be large enough that the collector would be immersed in it. In others, any amount is okay, so long as it is flowing.

The truth is that collectors aren't vampires, and their internal systems are both protected, and repaired, by large nanite colonies. Even if water somehow got in, any short would be rectified almost immediately.

Tencom has a ship

This is *almost* true. The story goes that the Tencom satellite relay facility outside of Aratayo has a starship that is proof against the Whisper.

The ability to resist the Whisper comes from either a piece of cunning programming, or from the fact that Tencom invented the Whisper. Some say the ship is never used because it's missing a part, others maintain a that it's a stealth ship and that it's coming and going all the time.

The Tencom facility does not have a starship, they have a digital gate. Digital gates are very common in the core sectors of the Empire, but their expense means they are little known in the outer sectors like the Crest.

A digital gate creates a one-way portal between two locations. Anyone who steps into the portal is turned into digital information, relayed through the planar communications network, and pushed out of the portal at the other end. Whether this process constitutes murder and cloning was among the questions being studied by the Tencom team before the Shatter.

The good news about digital gates, is that they *can* be used safely, despite echoing across the Whisper's network. The problem is they can only be used *once*. Once a gate has been activated, it's only a matter of minutes before the Whisper locates it. Anyone cast through a Whisper-tainted gate will emerge as a suzerain (if they're lucky). Disconnected tend to come out in barely identifiable strands.

To send from a gate, you have to have a receiving address. Fortunately, the receiving gate is not tainted by accepting an incoming signal. There are only a handful of gates in the Crest, including, but not limited to, one on each of the flagships, one in the palace on Mannheim, and one at the Hulgari Institute of Traveller Science on Hulgaria.

For a GM, the gates provide a useful way to move your heroes off planet, without also giving them the freedom of an untainted starship.

Drones kidnap live people and drop them into the Firepit

Drones are not well designed for the process of kidnapping a human. Most would be unable to lift a struggling fully-grown adult, and most post-Shatter humans could disable a drone long before it got them very high into the air.

However, the Whisper *wants* people to think this will happen. It will sometimes create figments that show people being carried off, or it will suborn a billboard and show artificial footage of someone being dropped into the Firepit.

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WORLD-BUILDING

Whether you intend to draw heavily from the material in this book, or create your own, most GMs will need to do some world-building of their own sooner or later. For many this is almost as exciting as playing the game, having the opportunity to brainstorm organisations, nations and the conflicts and interactions that may have happened before the players ever set foot on the site.

Once you get started, you'll probably find you don't need too much help coming up with ideas, but we've added some tips below to help your world come across more believable. These are just as valuable if you're designing a single building and its occupants as they are when designing an interstellar Empire.

Let your world inform the story, don't let it become the story

It's easy to get excited building complex backstories, elaborate connections and just plain cool ideas, *but* don't try to cram all those directly into your game. The local Stratum Fusion Plant might have been paid for by 'donations' which were actually a money-laundering scheme for the Bleeding Crane, but that was all before the Shatter. You shouldn't try to put this interesting detail into your game unless it somehow affects what the players are doing. While it *is* possible they might find some pre-Shatter documentation of this dirty deal, why should you force them to read about it?

So why write all the world-building if you're not going to use it? Well firstly some of it *will* matter, without world-building the Stratum Fusion Plant wouldn't exist in the setting at all. Secondly, knowing the background allows you to make tone changes that will bring originality to your setting, even if the players never learn the governing reason. The fusion plant's safety measures might be particularly lax, or perhaps Bleeding Crane influence led to a secret tunnel system built along with the plant so wanted fugitives could hide from investigators. These secondary details certainly could become relevant as the players move through the building, providing new opportunities, perhaps even threats.

Don't overuse peril

When world-building, you will naturally need to create plenty of dangerous spaces. Places where your heroes can face and overcome challenges, but don't forget that any area you design must still have a sense of functionality to it.

Suppose you come up with the idea of a crippled disconnected, once affluent but now fortified in her penthouse. Her fortress dwelling is protected on all sides by traps and motion activated guns while the largest horde of berserkers in the city lurk about outside seeking to gain entrance.

While this is an exciting premise, it will raise some questions among your players. Chiefly, how does this individual survive? Where does she get food, water, and social contact (always important to remember that most humans are not psychologically geared to prolonged hermitism, especially during dangerous events). Who resets the traps after they're triggered, who reloads the autoguns, and how much ammo is stockpiled?

When you have a premise you're excited about, don't be afraid to tackle some of these questions head on. Certainly, you need to be willing to surrender the setup if it's simply too implausible. But before resorting to that, experiment with adding answers to the questions. Perhaps the disconnected is regularly visited by a more mobile family member. If so, this family member must have some way through the defences and berserkers unharmed, perhaps there's a zipline from the roof of another building which the berserkers are too clumsy to safely use. This still leaves the question of how this friend leaves again, and why they haven't either moved in with the hermit permanently, or convinced the hermit to move in with them, but perhaps those questions can be answered as well. The question of how her automated defences have stayed isolated from the Whisper is another matter, but that could become a story point in itself. Perhaps the heroes return one day to find the guns have turned on their owner, or perhaps the disconnected isn't so disconnected after all, but a powerful system guardian who is protecting her defence guns as much as they protect her.

The point is that a set piece will never feel 'real' if it's not survivable. As you develop answers to the challenges of survivability and functionality (and perhaps even a little luxury) you'll add layers of detail that will bring your world alive.

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Build in Opposition

A quick technique for developing realistic communities is to pitch every character and organisation in terms of the status quo they most value, and then create one character who opposes the position. This opposition needn't (and often shouldn't) be violent or even effective, but it does demonstrate that the world is not waiting statically for the heroes to arrive. For better or for worse, there are many people trying to affect change.

The heroes might well come to a settlement where the town leader wants them to gather weapons from a nearby military depo to better arm the defenders. Besides being a solid basis for a quest, this seems fairly sensible, but that's not the same as unopposable.

Perhaps a young crusader wants the same weapons to arm a party of machine hunters, deeming them unnecessarily powerful for the settlers. Perhaps the town supply-master thinks too many weapons will make them a target for the Whisper and would just as soon the players keep the weapons for themselves, or sell them to a contact of his and split the profit

Once you have your two opposing positions, spare a quick thought to their relative power. The closer the parties are to equivalency, the more likely the disagreement is to become something the players can't ignore, but you don't need to always go this route. Perhaps the only person who disagrees with the settlement leader is the town drunk, or the disgraced former leader whose lacklustre policies got them into their current mess.

Each opposition shouldn't necessarily become a huge plot point – the players shouldn't have to solve some interpersonal dilemma every time they meet someone. Simply having the conflicts exist both brings your universe to life and gives your players some choice in terms of who to side with. Even if the only opposition is the woefully inept former leader, it still signals the players that they too can oppose the current leader's objectives.

MAKING COMPELLING ALLIES

The scope of writing on 'making a compelling character' is another that could encompass entire volumes, but there are a few key points we can cover in a short space of time and some are specific to interactive games like tabletop RPGs.

Note that here we're talking about making allied NPCs – characters who you intend to recur in your story and help lend it meaning. For allies who will just hold a gun and shoot alongside the players you can use the same guidelines for making opponents, see p. 282.

Motivation is Everything

In stories people like characters with strong motivations. The players don't want to work alongside some half-hearted survivor who just wants someone to tell them what to do.

When you're creating characters for a world there's a tendency to come up with character *goals* first and a goal should not be confused with a motivation. A goal is what a character is trying to achieve (*I will protect this settlement*) but the motivation is *why* (*because it's built on a site that has special meaning to me, I don't care about the people, I care about the place*). Note that in our example the motivation does have an impact on the goal. Such a character is protecting the stones beneath the survivor's feet, the actual survivors in the settlement are really just a means to an end.

It's perfectly acceptable to create a goal first and work backwards to motivation, just be mindful that you keep that motivation clear and strong in your mind thereafter. A good character feels like they're serving themselves, a bad character feels like they're serving the story.

Powerful in Their Own Way

Allies should be powerful within the story. This needn't mean they are high level, or politically connected, it simply means they have the capacity to effect outcomes within the story.

When determining this power, try to make it have as little overlap as possible with the players as this will make the allies abilities complimentary. A sword and gun toting power house will either provide the party nothing extra, or worse it will overshadow the party's own gun and sword toting powerhouse.

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By contrast consider an expert in ANI systems. They could provide the players with custom software, brute processing capacity and insight into electronic consciousnesses like the Whisper. Most importantly such a character *also needs the players*. Their skill set is useful certainly, but they aren't holding all the cards.

More Than Just a Quest Giver

Many world builders can over classify their characters. It's okay for allies to sometimes need help from the players, and vice versa, but be careful making things too transactional. It is a common trope that the players have to complete a quest for their so-called ally before their ally helps them in turn.

This is okay sometimes, but your game will be richer when you grow beyond it. Consider that your players should have some legitimate friends who will help them from sheer good will and don't have any quests to give. If the party and an ally share a goal, that ally should provide assistance without requiring some sort of exchange – after all it's in their best interest that the players succeed.

Also consider that it doesn't always have to be the players that prove themselves. Perhaps a trade *does* need to occur but its the ally who's worried the players will doubt their commitment. Thus, they give the players the quest reward *in advance* and then hope the party will repay them.

Shifting loyalties

Depending on how much overlap exists between the motivations of the party, and the motivations of the NPC, the status of 'ally' might be almost permanent, occasional, or a strict one-time thing.

Suppose a party want to unite all the settlements in Aratayo to help fight the Whisper. They might find an individual who believes most of the settlement leaders are inept and will help the players bring the settlements together under his banner.

When the players then decide they want to draw an army from the combined settlement populations that same character might suddenly refuse. He needs those soldiers to keep his new holdings safe and suppress dissidents.

This leads into the important question of how your ally handles disagreements. Do they walk out of the alliance, refusing to help the players further? Do they help but ask for concessions in return? Do they feign agreement but attempt to discretely subvert the players intentions thereafter? Perhaps they switch sides completely and become an outright adversary of the players?

Keep in mind that how your ally handles conflict should be consistent between when they're helping the players and opposing them. A character who assisted the players by acting as a negotiator, should not immediately resort to violence when they disagree with the party.

Also be mindful that loyalties shift more than one way. Bystanders, or even villains can become allies or vice versa.

Don't Overuse Grey Areas

In fantasy, RPGs beings tend to neatly divide into 'monsters' which are villains and 'civilised humanoids' who are not. In a cyberpunk setting there is no inherent shorthand.

This is certainly part of the charm but remember that your players need some solid reference points to stay oriented. Characters shouldn't be switching sides on a hair trigger and every bystander shouldn't be so amoral that the players decide no one's worth saving.

For the better part players should feel confident that they can trust their allies and persecute their enemies. The exceptions to this should be key story moments and while they may be surprising they should be telegraphed in some way.

William Kwan (Quote: 36187234)

MAKING COMPELLING VILLAINS

Most times what makes a good allied character is the same as what makes a good villain. After all both are *characters;* all that is different is the incompatibility of their current goals.

Again note that we are talking about villainous NPCs here, not combat opponents. For guidelines on combat opponents see p. 282.

Evil is Good Driven to Extremes

When designing motivations for villains the most common source of 'evil' is a normal human motivation without restraints. After the Shatter most survivors are interested in ensuring safety for themselves and their friends, a behaviour that most would consider neutral, if not benign.

But a survivor who is willing to stop at nothing to ensure their family stays safe? A survivor who kidnaps specialists from other settlements and makes them work for her at gunpoint, who thins out collectors and berserkers by kiting them into unsuspecting scavenger parties? This character is definitely not on the side of good.

The Moral Event Horizon

In writing, the moral event horizon is an act that, once performed, a character is now irrevocably considered a villain. No matter what they do they cannot be redeemed.

Different people have different ideas of what acts define the moral event horizon. What's important to a GM is not establishing some sense of 'moral absolute' but simply understanding roughly where each member of your group defines the event horizon.

If you know that your group feel very protective of small animals, then a survivor who eats kittens to survive might be considered to have crossed the event horizon. This might be true despite your best efforts to demonstrate that the character had no choice.

Knowing the event horizon is particularly important if you want to create a redeemable villain, or have an ally who believes a certain amount of the ends justifies the means.

Sensible Goals

Perhaps the best reason to understand your villains' motivations is that it prevents you from setting inexplicable goals. Rare villains (like the Whisper itself) are so alien and unknowable that they can engage in what appears to be 'evil for evils sake'. From most, however, the players will expect to see a thread of sense behind it all.

This is particularly important when dealing with the zaibatsu. Science fiction is thick with examples of 'evil corporations' who seem to engage in sinister acts for no clear profit. Try to avoid following this example.

In particular keep in mind that most villains are capable of at least *some* long-term thinking. Perhaps blowing up an entire settlement might be the most *expedient* way to assassinate its leader, but is that worth alienating all the other settlements?

Evil can be Intimate

There's a temptation to make all villainous acts large scale. Certainly destroying an entire arcology is going to get the players attention, but its key to understand that scale demonstrates *power*, it does not create emotional impact.

Consider a small settlement that had galvanised around a true leader. She carried them out of the Shatter and held them together through what followed. She was always the first into danger and the last to leave. Wise, intelligent and brave despite knowing the risks: she was everything the settlers aspired to be.

And now she's dead.

Strangled in her sleep by an augmented murderer taking his revenge out on the settlements bit by bloody bit. There's no telling what future remains for the settlement now, but they want you to stop this monster, make sure he never strikes again.

Note that this villain has probably killed under a dozen souls, none of them directly connected to the players, but focusing on the single individual, on what they *meant* to those around them, is all that's needed to demonstrate the cruelty of the act.

Indeed the augmented might not even be that powerful (certainly not powerful enough to take down an arcology) but he is definitely now a villain.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

MAKING COMPELLING WHISPER AGENTS

As alluded to before, the Whisper and its agents do not conform to a lot of the rules of compelling villains. The Whisper has its own motivations (see What Does it Want? p. 23), but for the better part of the game the players will be unaware of these things. This will tend to make the Whisper seem random or unnecessarily malicious.

The Whisper Itself

In your story you shouldn't be trying to categorise the ambient Whisper as a character. For most of the campaign the Whisper works better characterised as a natural disaster, like a tornado or Earthquake. Its impacts are vast and terrifying and unless you subscribe to one of the many superstitions about it, it cannot be accurately predicted.

You can no more fight, or reason with, the Whisper than you could a volcano. The only recourse is to seek shelter and pick up the pieces once its moved on.

The Faceless Hordes

The vast majority of the Whisper's agents have had their consciousnesses destroyed by the Shatter. When a faceless horde is called for, the Whisper can definitely deliver.

But the lost are not zombies from your choice of horror films. We use the term 'echoes' a lot and not without intention. *Most* of the original person is gone but just enough remains to make encounters unsettling.

When the players pass a security checkpoint a lost might stare through them and then inexplicably give them the thumbs up. A berserker might smash through the window and then pause for a beat to grin at one of the players before lunging at a second player with a kitchen knife. A HPDF security droid might be warning scavengers about a 'dangerous robot in the area' even while it mows them down.

The goals of the berserkers should always be the goals of the Whisper, but they should exhibit *echoes* of other motivations. Glitches that leave the players asking 'why did it do that' when the last shell casing is still rolling across the tiles.

The Uncanny Suzerains

Suzerains retain a surprising amount of their original psych and intelligence and critically retain the ability to speak. What defines them most is that the Whisper has crudely written a single new goal through the middle of their consciousness.

Most commonly this involves protecting some site from trespass, or some item from being claimed. Sometimes it is about attacking a settlement or hunting an individual.

The result of this damage is that the suzerain tries to contextualise this goal into their old motivations and old life. A suzerain who was once an executive and has been assigned to protect their office building might view all intruders as industrial spies. Her defensive efforts might center on a safe containing a business plan for months long past. A suzerain cop assigned to hunt and kill a player character might believe they're guilty of 'every crime we've got a law for'. On catching them they might insist 'he's got the judges wrapped round his little finger, it ain't pretty but if we want to see justice done we're gonna have to get our hands a little dirty'

In general suzerains should seem irreparably trapped in a fantasy that causes them to pursue the Whisper's goal, albeit in a slightly warped way. Nothing the players can do or say will fix these tragic figures but in the right circumstances they might not actually be enemies.

Should that same suzerain cop be pursuing the parties target, he would have no interest in harming the players, and might make for a strange ally indeed.

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"FIRST FAMINE"

EXCERPT FROM CRUEL DEMOGRAPHICS BY JAWAHAR PATEL

I suppose it's in the interests of simplification, but since the 2100s the fate of Earth has been broadly taught as 'overpopulation'. This is both a gross oversimplification of the problems facing Earth in 2040s and an invitation to assume our ancestors blindly barrelled into their fate. This was not so.

The population issue was theorised at least as early as Robert Malthus in the late 1700s. By the turn of the millennium people had recognised that Earth had an absolute maximum volume it could support based on arable land and it was somewhere between 9 and 10 billion. At the time this was all theoretical.

In 2030 this problem stopped being theoretical. The population was still well under 9 billion, but it was an issue of *where* growth had occurred. Many of the world's top food exporters (particularly in south America) experienced the lions share of this growth, combined with developing industries and increases in quality of life their exports dropped off faster than anyone could have expected.

Some of the richest countries in the world suddenly experienced drastic food shortages. Food being such a basic human need, many of those nations discovered it was a problem money simply could not solve.

AWETECH-0

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

PART II

RUNNING THE GAME

THE FIRST SESSION: PRE-GAME ACTIVITIES

A 'session' is anytime your group gets together to play, whether for one hour or twenty. Normally we recommend you arrange four to six hours for a good session with some discussion and plot development and a little combat.

GETTING EVERYONE TOGETHER

Because game sessions present a sizable chunk of a day, it is recommended that you plan your sessions a couple of weeks out. For the first session of a campaign, you should try and make sure everyone can attend since this will normally involve character creation and establish the initial party dynamic.

If not everyone can make it to later sessions, you should have established process. We've found it easiest to assume that the missing player's character is always standing just out of shot, facing similar challenges to everyone else and succeeding with no lasting repercussions. If a critical skill is needed this character can even briefly step into shot to provide the necessary expertise.

The out of shot character will still level-up, get a share of wealth and other rewards, and the player should be brought up to date on plot developments when they return. The one exception is artefact items, as we generally try to give these out as a part of a significant moment for the receiving character – a gesture best delayed until the recipient can attend.

Whatever approach you take, try not to 'punish' people for being unable to attend. You don't know what they might be dealing with away from the table. Furthermore, you'll get better attendance if you keep the game a safe space, free of judgement.

PREPARING FOR THE FIRST SESSION

The first session generally consists of character creation, with a short stretch of play at the end.

As GM, you should familiarise yourself with the creation rules and take a quick look at the classes and origins so that you know how they'll fit in with your setting.

If you're playing the example session in this book, give the notes a thorough read, and make sure you can find key details on the fly. If you're planning on running your own session, you'll need to put together some notes on the settings, characters, and events so you don't have to adlib more than you're comfortable doing. See Part IV - Designing a Campaign, p.142.

Make sure you have pencils, a couple of erasers, note paper, character sheets (one for everyone plus a spare) and at least one set of dice. It also helps to have everyone bring some snacks or drinks (if you group have a sweet tooth, try to have at least some robust savoury foods to prevent a sugar crash mid-session).

RUNNING CHARACTER CREATION

Try to make sure everyone owns a copy of the *Play Guide* as they'll need to refer almost constantly during creation.

Once everyone has arrived, allow some time for everyone to get settled and catch up on real life. Kick off character creation with a description of the setting. This should be more about establishing the feel of the world than communicating the myriad of nuances that a resident might know. If you don't have time to come up with anything else, you can use the intro description in the *Play Guide*.

With the world established, you can now guide your players through character creation (see p.63 of the *Play Guide*). A few helpful tips:

- Try to keep everyone on roughly the same step. Players who make decisions quickly are normally used to waiting, so you don't need to rush anyone.

William Kwan (Quo: 36187234)

- You can help with class and origin choices by providing a short overview of each class and, in particular, how they fit in your campaign.
- Keep an eye on people's behaviour, sometimes a friend might be struggling but too shy to ask for help.
- There's always at least one super keen person who wants to build a character ahead of time. Try to get together with them in advance and build their concept. Then both of you can help others in the session.
- Don't be too defensive during character creation. You'll see all manner of weird concepts, clichés, over simplifications, and more. Expect some of these to irk you, but make a point of accepting things that make you uncomfortable unless you believe they will create untenable problems. Do not design-police your players.

BRINGING THE PARTY TOGETHER

While sometimes it can be fun to have the heroes just meeting one another for the first time, we recommend most groups establish a party backstory. This avoids any character having to 'prove' themselves to the others and can head off many party disputes by putting the players in the mindset of long-time colleagues rather than allies of convenience.

This is particularly important if you have a divisive storyline (such as a disconnected uprising against the ginbushi). In most cases, the group history needn't be elaborate, for example: *you've been an effective team for a long time now, providing your services to a variety of desperate settlements*.

Make sure you give players the opportunity to add to this backstory, particularly as it relates to their character's part in it. Keep an eye out for any character links that are likely to cause problems later and address them now. Someone who wants to play a traitor hidden in the party's midst, needs to be challenged on how that fits into a cooperative game before they've spent ten sessions developing the character concept.

Suppose you have a former criminal, and a former cop in your party, this is the opportunity to prevent them coming to blows later. It can be as simple as establishing that, in the months working together, they've each learnt to look the other way when the other bends their concept of the rules. The two characters might not like each other's methods, but the Whisper doesn't reward picky survivors.

A few quiet words early on can avoid many shouted ones later.

PROVIDE THE FIRST OBJECTIVE

Unless your first scene is a briefing (which is a little dry, and not recommended) you should make sure the players are clear on their immediate objective and who they're working for. You can provide this information as part of the group backstory or include it in your opening scene description.

Don't try to convey all of the context and interested parties into your objective statement.

A Good Objective
You've been sent by your brother to recover an experimental DNI from an abandoned lab.

A Bad Objective
Your brother owes significant money to the Machine Cult, and if he can't pay up in forty-eight hours, they'll throw him into a pit of berserkers. Your brother hopes that he can placate them with an experimental DNI that he heard about from some refugees who claimed to be former employees at the lab.

The details in the second example aren't bad to have, but you shouldn't force them on the players until they ask, or until knowing becomes critical. This early, players can easily become overloaded with information. After all they're trying to learn the rules, the setting, and the specifics of the adventure all at once.

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THE FIRST SESSION: PLAYING THE GAME

Before we even get into the mechanics, if this is the first time you've ever run a game, expect that it'll feel a little awkward. No matter how prepared you are, GMing is a unique kind of public speaking and until you've had practice there'll be elements that are clunky. All that smooths out with time and won't really impact whether your group has fun or not. If you're really nervous about speaking in front of a group, don't be afraid to be upfront about that. Always keep in mind the people at your table are there to have fun, most are probably your friends, no one should be there to tear anyone else down.

Now let's talk about the actual mechanics of GMing a session:

SET THE SCENE

Describe where the players are right now and how they came to be there. Be sparing in your description and avoid unnecessary specifics in favour of tone:

Strong Description

You've been dropped by LEVV onto the centre of an abandoned helipad. The pad soars above street level, a rickety metal stair disappears into the chilly midnight fog below. There's not a safety rail to be seen and the whole structure creaks and moans in the cold air as you collect yourselves.

Weak Description

It's eleven fifty-three pm, you stand on a circular platform twenty metres across. Four, six-metre-thick steel pillars hold it eighty metres above the street below. It's six degrees Celsius, and there is a light fog. A stairway a metre wide goes down a half storey to a one-metre by two-metre platform before proceeding back in the other direction to another platform. This pattern repeats thirteen more times on its way to a small building, three metres high, six across and two wide. It has a single window on the long side facing the road...

Some general tips:

- Let names do the talking: a helipad makes more sense to the human brain than a circular platform. If some of your players think it's square, and others circular; will it really matter to the scene?

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- Describe immediate threats: falling off the helipad is probably lethal, so it should be covered, but all that's necessary is to provide the sense of height, not the exact fall distance.
- Mention anything characters can obviously interact with: Our scene is static, but if there was a laptop, or a bank of switches, or even a non-player character their presence should be noted.
- Describe the unusual: In our world, a drop of eighty metres would always occasion a hand rail. If the players are likely to rely on a 'real world fact', it's important to warn them of any instance that's an exception. If the players aren't likely to rely on the fact, then ask yourself: does this helipad really need to have no handrails?
- Focus on what the players can see: The small building at the bottom of the pad shouldn't be described until someone descends the stairs.
- Don't be afraid of saving details for questions: The number and strength of the helipads supports might well be material if the players decide to try and demolish the platform with explosives, but it's okay to save this discussion until the players give some indication of their intent.

LET THE PLAYERS EXPLAIN THEIR INTENTIONS

Here the players take their opportunity to interact with the world. This needs different handling with different groups. Some may need a little prompting while others will be talking over each other in the excitement to share their ideas.

If your group is boisterous, you may occasionally need to establish that the louder players have had their moment and let the quieter players say their piece. If an action is contentious (such as leaving an ally for dead) you may want to call for a vote against the two most popular options.

Ultimately you should make sure you know what each character is doing before proceeding to the next step.

If your group seems to be floundering not out of shyness but because they literally can't figure out a way forward, you can give them some tips. This is often best done by getting characters to utilise skills that might tell them more about their predicament or options. If the players want to break into a building but can't come up with an approach, you could invite a *spot/listen*, *spycraft* or *intuition (places/things)* check and reward success with possible inroads like vents or skylights.

Keeping the players from getting lost
There are four main reasons your entire group may be uncomfortable choosing an action.

1) It's not clear what they *should* do
This happens when the immediate objective is unclear, or it's unclear how it relates to the scene you've just set. If you tell the players they've been sent to find medicine for a disconnected settlement and then start the adventure in a paint factory, don't be surprised when they seem unclear on how to proceed.

2) There are too many options
Telling the players their objective is to defeat as many of the Whisper's agents as possible and then have them step off a boat into a whole city of such agents will cause analysis paralysis. There are so many Whisper agents, and so many ways of dispatching them, that it's impossible to pick a 'best' choice.

3) It's not clear what they *can* do
If you put the heroes in a crashing space ship, tell them it's irreparable, has no escape system, and the controls are dead, the players will be a long time taking action. Every mechanism by which a character might enact change on the scene is apparently disabled.

4) It's *too* clear what they should do
Ironically one of the most confusing moments is when description stops at a point where the next step is so obvious that it's unclear why a decision is being required. If the objective is: meet with your boss and the scene description stops just outside the office door, the players are going to wonder why the description didn't include going in and sitting down. They may expect some sort of trap and suddenly start looking for alternatives.

Beyond this, be mindful of the precedents you set as a GM. for example, if illegal break-ins have repeatedly met with quick discovery and massive peril, the party may disregard it as a viable solution to future problems.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

RESOLVE THE PLAYERS' ACTIONS

Go through the actions in whatever order is most exciting or beneficial for the players. State what the player character does (you can dress it up a little if you like, just don't alter the intention) and ask them to make any skill checks you deem necessary. Lastly, describe the outcome of the players' actions, adjusting as necessary for the success, or failure, of the skill check.

Below is an example of what that might look like:

Belle (playing Shotgun Citizen): I'd like to walk down the hall and peak through a gap in the door.

GM: You slip quickly down the corridor and crack the door open to peer inside. Take a stealth check.

Belle (Shotgun Citizen): Eight

GM: That's a fail: the door creaks loudly as it opens, and inside you see three lost, their heads pivot doll-like towards you, their eyes staring through you. Roll for initiative.

HAVE OTHER CHARACTERS ACT

The action should always focus on the player characters, but be mindful that any other characters in the scene don't become statues. For most background characters, it's enough to describe their actions collectively (*there are dozens of people in the mall, browsing, buying and carousing*) and to only revisit them when their actions take a significant turn (*as a gunshot rings out, the mall customers start bolting for the doors*).

For more important characters, a single sentence each should be enough to keep the players aware of their activities.

SWITCH TO COMBAT (IF NECESSARY)

If the players actions lead to combat, you should switch over to the combat rules, see the combat rules in the *Play Guide*, p.32. Despite the more structured environment, for the GM, many of the same principles apply.

Start by sketching a quick map of the area, and make sure your players are clear on what all the elements are. Next begin with the character at the top of the initiative order; ask them what actions they want to take. Unlike in normal play, you should immediately resolve the current player's actions and skill checks before proceeding to the next player.

All opponents and non-player characters act on the GM's turn and use the same rules as the players. Try not to get too caught up in meticulous strategy and careful positioning of the non-player characters as it can get very time consuming when a lot of pieces are on the table.

Important characters should move with a bit of tactical consideration, but it's okay to move minions as a group. If a squad is trying to flank the players, but when you quickly move them, a few have blocked shots, and a few are over-exposed to return fire, that's okay. Remember the objective is to give the players a fun combat experience, not a demonstration of your tactical prowess.

Once all opponents have been downed, captured, or have fled, combat is over and normal play can resume. Be sure to allow the players to perform some healing per the Rest and Regroup section (p.48 *Play Guide*).

THE ADVENTURE CONTINUES

Continue to move through the cycle of action and consequence. It sounds simple, and in principle it is, but like many things, it is easy to learn and difficult to master.

William Kwan (Quiet 36187234)

Tips for making a great adventure on the fly:

• Monitor the group
Your biggest advantage over traditional storytellers is constant real-time feedback, so use it shamelessly. Do your players seem to be losing interest in the current scene? Paraphrase a wrap-up and cut to the next. Did that nameless extra just do something that has unexpectedly endeared them to the players? Find an excuse for them to stick around as an ally or come back as a recurring villain. Remember that, in between sessions, you'll have plenty of time to link the chaos of a single session to the long-term plot. On the other hand, if you don't take the time to make sure people have fun right now, you can't fix it retrospectively later.

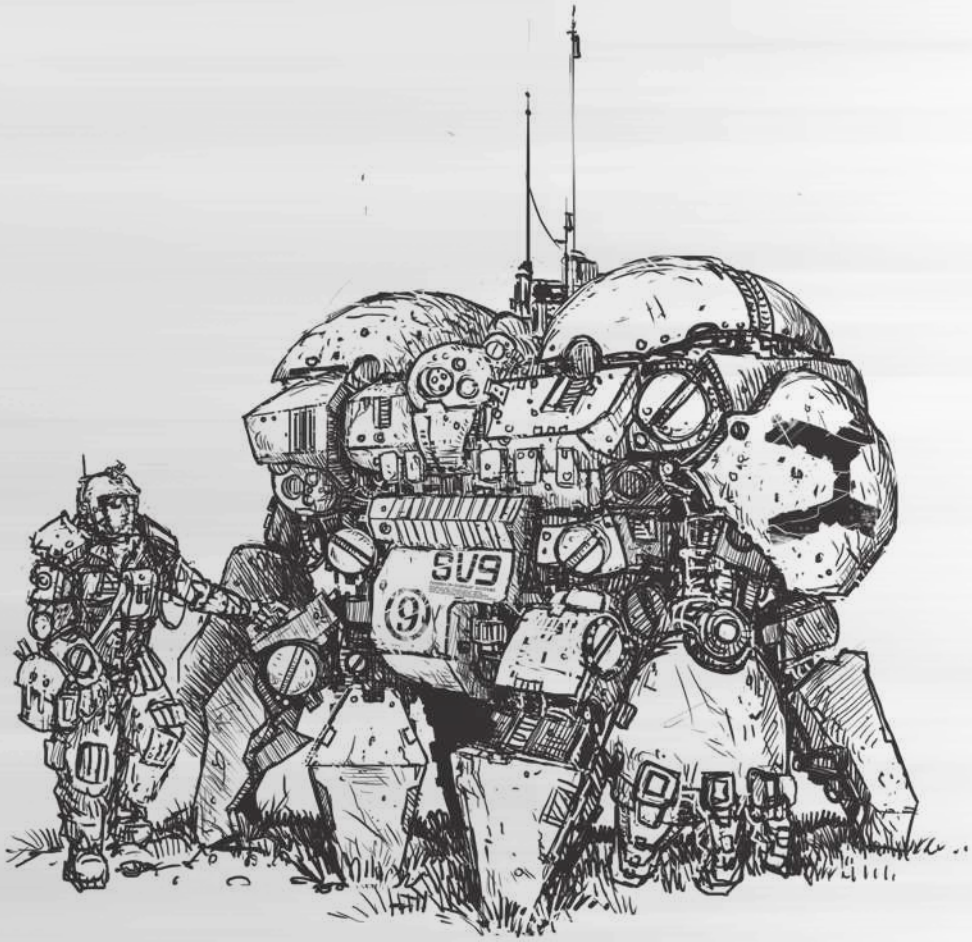
• Long actions don't need long descriptions
'We fly to the arcology on the Western Continent' might be a player action and if they're talking about a domestic aircraft the trip might take ten hours or more. For all that, it doesn't need an elaborate description: 'You set your course for the arcology, and after an uneventful trip, you arrive late in the evening.'

• Are these obstacles important?
A heavily armed group of heroes would be halted quickly at the door to an arcology, and it would take a bureaucratic miracle to get their weapons through the door with them.

But is wrangling bureaucracy important to your story, and more importantly, is it fun? If not, paraphrase it. Your players will thank you.

• Pace yourself
Keep in mind pacing when following the previous two points. While you want to keep your adventure from bogging down in boring places, it's important to give your players a chance to catch their breath between shattering revelations and near-death experiences. Varying intensity keeps the players from becoming desensitised.

• The borderless principles
Don't ever put barriers in your players' way to make your own life easier. Remember: that wall can be climbed, that lock can be picked or the door smashed, the players can go back to town if they forgot something – and if you put the end villain in front of the heroes in the first act, there's nothing to stop them from shooting him in the face.



William Kwan (Order #36487234)

BEYOND THE BASICS

IMPROVISING

Improvising is what makes RPG games truly borderless. When the scene description mentions an ancient biplane among the discarded anachronisms of a warehouse and one of the players asks, 'can I fix it?' and despite there being nothing in her notes to address the players having their own aircraft… the GM says, 'of course.'

The real skill behind improvising is courage. Quick thinking is helpful, of course, but that's impossible to do when you're panicking. In the biplane example, there are a thousand complications and ramifications to the players having such a thing (parts, fuel, weapons, armour, runways, and enemy air defences are just a few) but all you need to focus on is right now. Right now, all you need to figure out is 'what is needed to fix this broken item' and that sort of question you've probably dealt with many times before.

That's really all there is to it. Don't try to guess or manage the impact something will have on the whole campaign, you'll fix that between sessions when you adjust your lamp-posts. Have faith in your future self to fix any problems you make and just throw together what feels fun now.

REWARDING EXCITING PLAY

A GM alone can do a lot to keep their audience engaged, but it's certainly easier if you're not alone. For this reason, you should encourage players who take interesting or daring actions.

The easiest way to do this is by providing 1d6 advantage towards their objective. So, if a player is willing to take a difficult *acrobatics* roll to leap out of a moving LEVV and dive through a second-floor bathroom window, you should give them a 'surprise' advantage on their attacks against the opponents inside.

This *is* a type of favouritism, so care is critical in its use. If a player is always going on and on about how their backstory has led to this moment, but it's boring everyone to death, you shouldn't provide the rewards. On the other hand, if someone is very new, and everyone can see they're *trying*, you should provide the rewards even if their attempt slows things down a little.

Player's shouldn't feel like they have to sandwich every attack in flowery description just to win, but they should feel rewarded for 'playing to the crowd'.

DYNAMIC DICE READING

Dynamic dice reading is an easy way to add more flavour to your games. The technique simply involves determining *how much* a character succeeded, or failed by, and adjusting your description.

A player who attempts *stealth* to sneak past a guard and beats the difficulty by 10 points didn't just 'succeed', he was a ghost. Conversely 10 points *below* the difficulty indicates someone who made every possible noise.

Depending on your group, comedy can work extremely well in these circumstances. 'Not only do you sneak past him, but you steal his wallet, play a game of solitaire on his computer, and pour his coffee out the window'. 'You step in a waste paper basket which turns out to be full of miniature novelty cymbals'.

Try to make sure that a natural 20 is always cause of celebration and a natural 1 is always dreaded. These results don't come up often and can really spice up play if dramatized appropriately.

Lastly, remember players can be sensitive about failures. If someone is failing a lot in a session, try to gloss over the description rather than revelling in their poor luck.

If you're not used to the 20-sided dice, the tables below give a rough guide on how to consider results.

DYNAMIC DICE ROLLING – SUCCESS

Distance over Difficulty	Magnitude of success: Example result for a jump
0–1 points	Marginal – You just get one foot on the ledge and after desperately windmilling your arms you manage to tip your weight forwards.
2–5 points	Solid – You clear the jump easily.
6+ points	Excellence – You soar over the gap with contemptuous ease, landing in a neat crouch on the far end.
Natural 20	Unsurpassed – You used to jump chasms like this back home all the time. Sometimes you would *dig* chasms like this just so you could jump them.

William Kwan (Quiz - 36187234)

DYNAMIC DICE ROLLING – FAILURES

Distance below Difficulty	Magnitude of success: Example result for a jump
1–2 points	Marginal failure – You slam into the ledge on the far side, your fingers scraping in the dirt as you try desperately to gain purchase*.
3-9 points	Solid failure – You reach out desperately for the far edge, but your fingers fall just inches short before you plummet to the bottom.
10+ points	Disaster – You barely make it halfway across before you realise this was a terrible idea and fall to the bottom.
Natural 1	Ignominious – Just as you're about to jump you trip and tumble face-first into the chasm.

** Consider letting them pull themselves up next round (or be assisted by another character)*

KNOW YOUR SETTING

Almost everything you do as a GM will come across more powerful, or just be easier to implement, if you know your setting well. By this we don't simply mean the material in this book, though that may play a large part, we also mean the cast you've created and the story you're planning on telling.

If you understand the tone of an area, you can make the rewards and challenges match the tone in both delivery and type. If you understand the story you're telling, it'll be easier to improvise how the villains might react when the players throw a curve ball. Even dynamic dice reading is easier if you understand the setting. If you know the silos behind those villains are full of flammable gases, you might tell the players their natural 20 wasn't a hit, or at least it didn't hit the target directly, instead it detonated the silo and wiped out half the opposition in one shot.

Ideally, all elements of your game, from characters and gear to the challenges faced and the story itself, should seem naturally connected to the setting they're found in. In order to operate, players make many educated guesses about a universe ('if we throw the villain off this cliff, the fall will kill him'), and an inconsistent universe means players will constantly be coming up against unexpected outcomes or effects.

FUDGING THE DICE

Many game masters make their dice rolls hidden from players. This allows them to announce a different result in situations where the dice seem to have it in for the players. This can save the day when the heroes backs are against the wall and every villain seems to roll natural 20s to hit, and maximum damage besides.

While we acknowledge this as a time-honoured technique, we recommend against it, especially for new game masters. Misreporting dice rolls can become habit-forming, and if players spot you doing it, even in their favour, it can severely undermine the critical trust between player and game master. You expect the players to use solid planning and quick-thinking to balance out bad luck, they expect the same of you.

This means that a sudden change in luck might transform the session you had intended. The players' assault on a shuttle that's about to leave the planet may stall at the hangar door as low-level enemies deliver a punishing series of injuries. Instead of falsifying dice results, make the chaos part of the action. The players may decide to fall back, in which case it's up to you to make sure there is a safe (relatively) way to do so. Alternatively, they may decide to press forward but look for a different way in, and you should support their plan adaptions. Maybe there *is* a loose sewer grate or convenient skylight after-all.

In general, it is better to work with the players to alter and adjust the story and world in a way that *builds on* the disaster the dice are causing. Discounting results entirely will flatten out the extremes from your game, which can provide a very bland experience, or one where the only time bad things happen is when the GM is feeling vengeful, and then your players will rightly distrust you.

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WHEN THINGS GO REALLY WRONG

With a bit of confidence, you can adlib your way out of anything, but it is possible for things to go so far askew from the plan that you start to have legitimate concerns about whether the remaining story can still be salvaged. In this case there are three techniques, in order of escalation:

1. Take a Recess
Let the players grab some snacks and have a chat for fifteen to thirty minutes while you make some emergency notes for the unexpected turn.

2. End Early
Let the players know that, to do their actions justice, you'll need to review the whole story before continuing. Schedule your next session and then break out your favourite board games for the rest of the current one.

3. Crisis Discussion
Stop play to have an out-of-character discussion. Be open in admitting your concern that the players' most recent actions may have broken something you can't fix. Brainstorm with them about how things might be fixed or if there's a new direction they'd like to explore. It may be necessary to risk giving a few minor spoilers to fully articulate the problem, and that's okay.

Involving the players like this also allows some drastic solutions like ret-conning (a mutual agreement to change past events) or even temporary meta-acting by the players (such as allowing a villain to escape even though there's no reason their characters would do so).

The most important thing to remember in these situations is that you are not alone. Your players are also your friends, and while they enjoy making challenges for you (as you do for them), they will step up to help if it's necessary to save the game that everyone has put so much work and emotion into

DEALING WITH INTERRUPTIONS

When you're describing a scene, or circumstance, you'll often find one of the players will say something to you or the group. There are several kinds of interruptions, and we recommend a different approach for dealing with each.

Player Tells a Joke
This is perhaps the most common interruption. The villain has a funny name, or something about the setup is amusing, and a player makes a quip to the group.

These interruptions generally shouldn't be seen as a problem and, in fact, can be important in keeping a lively atmosphere. If you censure your players for humour your game will become dreary fast.

It is possible for this to go too far, however, if you can't get through a particular sentence because of an endless train of jokes; it's fine to ask the players how long they plan on continuing. If possible, try to be a bit tongue in cheek about the way you do this, you don't want to destroy the atmosphere of humour, just to point out that you'll be there all night otherwise.

Player Wants to Take Action
This one is, perhaps, the most important one to keep an ear out for. When you're describing events, occasionally a player will attempt to interject with something they wish to do.

This is a critical moment for GMing because it means your players are signalling that they want to take ownership over the story. If you're describing the arcology executive getting back into her limo and one of the players announces that they're going to shoot her before she can close the door, you need to stop right away and resolve that action. If you continue to the end of your description and then force the player to shoot through the limo's bulletproof glass (or worse let the limo drive off completely) you're forcing your players to follow a script and they will quickly become frustrated.

The only time it is okay to complete your description is when you believe the players would take different action if they had all of the information. If the players are going through an abandoned train yard, and you announce that one of the train doors starts to squeal open, a player may interrupt by saying they want to throw a grenade in the gap. If the rest of your description announces that the widening gap reveals the missing children from the settlement, you may want to finish your description before making the player a child murderer.

On the other hand, if the players are looking for missing children, they probably shouldn't be slinging grenades without looking. The point is that, in cases like this, it's okay to use your judgement to make sure the players feel neither railroaded, nor misled.

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Unrelated Interruptions

The most difficult kind of interruptions you'll have to deal with are those not related to the game in any way. Fortunately, these are also the rarest.

This occurs when a player takes a moment to hold a private conversation with another player, and it can occur during GM narration, or even during other players' turns. A little bit of this is okay and should be safely ignored, the players are likely friends and sometimes they need to share quick reminders or just want to have a quick chat.

Like jokes, however, it needs to be addressed if it's getting out of hand. Before you start pulling anyone up, it's important to look at your own work. If your session is exciting and engaging, you're less likely to have players getting distracted. Constant side conversations might indicate it's time to wrap up a scene.

On the other hand, if there is a serial offender and everyone else seems very engaged, you need to address the person, not the game. It's best to do this one-on-one before or after the session, calling someone out in the middle of a session is embarrassing and more likely to yield a pithy or explosive result. Your goal should be to understand why the player is getting distracted and if there's anything you can do to make the game more exciting for them. Even if the conversation yields no actionable information, the player will often take the hint that they need to improve their behaviours.

If the behaviour continues, you're left with a difficult judgement call – at what point is a behaviour disruptive enough that requires excluding someone from the game? There's no easy answer to this, and we recommend against any rash decisions. Kicking someone out of a game can have ramifications far beyond the table and whatever you do you have to live with.

WHEN PLAYERS FIGHT

From time to time, players will get into disagreements. Though the GM is there to adjudicate on the characters, not the players, people will often look to you to make things right. Conflict mediating is an entire field, and we can't begin to scratch the surface, but here are some good practices for a GM.

Don't Try to Resolve Problems from Outside the Game

If two players are going through a messy breakup or something similar, it's going to come up at the table. As GM, it isn't your role to tell them *who's right*, and mid-game certainly isn't the time to try relationship counselling. As a friend, you may offer to discuss it with them later, but as GM you have to tell them to either put their differences on hold, or one (or both) will have to be the bigger man and bow out of the game. Don't be cruel, but don't be afraid to be clear about the situation.

Set Boundaries

Players will use their characters to mess with one another. Though mostly harmless, this can quickly get out of hand. We recommend most GMs treat any comment involving the theft or damage to a player characters property, or any attempt to harm another player character, as though it never existed.

Resolve Problems Early

Try to keep an eye out for role-playing choices that will later prove divisive and address them before they hit a crisis. A character who wants to join a secret society that the others are planning to destroy needs to be asked how they see that ending.

A bold role-player might be planning to be a double agent, or maybe they want to play a fall and redemption story. These are okay so long as all players are aware (even if their characters aren't) but a straight-up 'traitor trying to destroy the party from within' should never be controlled by a player.

Use the 'When Things go Really Wrong' Techniques Mentioned Previously

These techniques are normally intended to give you time to address story problems, but they can provide agitated players an important time out till cooler heads prevail. Crisis sessions are an effective last resort when something explodes unexpectedly, provided you can remind everyone that, unlike their characters, they're still friends.

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ADJUDICATING THE RULES

One of the first things players will judge a GM on is their ability to arbitrate fairly. Most players would rather game with a GM they trust, even if his stories are predictable, than one they think will undermine or railroad them.

The principles below should put you in the right mindset for handling any weird and wonderful case that might come up. If you're looking for some more specific examples, you can find a 'panic box' in the appendix that includes real world examples of rule adjudications for *Wireless Soul Transmission*.

WHAT IS FAIR?

At the table, the final measure of a 'fair' ruling is judged by the people sitting around it. You need to make clear and decisive choices, but you should always try to gauge the mood in the room.

Suppose a player wants to do some incredible acrobatic feat that stretches the rules of what can be accomplished in a combat round. How engaged are the other players in seeing this happen? If they seem excited to see him succeed (or fail), then allow the acrobatics check. If he tries to do the same thing again five minutes later the mood around the table might be very different, and you may wish to flag that you won't keep making the same exception for the same player.

This approach might seem to violate some 'objective' sense of justice, but remember you're running a game, not a court. Principles like temperance and consistency should only be as important to you as they are to your players.

MOST PLAYERS WANT CONSISTENCY

While there will definitely be exceptions, you'll find that most players will be looking for consistent applications of the rules. If you decided last week that a heavy rifle could shoot through two inches of concrete, then the players will expect it to be able to this week as well.

For this reason, you should always keep precedent in mind when setting rules. You will have some hairy moments, and your players will tend to try and convince you to make the ruling that will most favour them. If you're worried about precedent turn the scenario around – what if a *villain* were trying to use this rule exception on the player? Better still, if you're being pressured by the players, ask *them* that question, point out that if their heavy rifle can shoot through the concrete bunker, then the enemy's pulse gun can hit them right back. Is this still what they want?

WHOSE SIDE IS THE GM ON?

Judges are supposed to be impartial, but a GM is not a judge. The good GM is on the side of the players (as a group) and will happily bend the rules to create a fun experience

If a player wants to move one more square than the rules allow, go for it, so long as doing so is exciting for all the players. The important point is to avoid favouring one player over another, they should feel equal in your eyes

Conversely, you should never allow one of the villains to stretch the rules this way. No GM can afford the loss of trust that advocating for the villains creates. If you do this, your players will stop seeing the rules as a vehicle of their fun, and start using dogged adherence as a shield against the GM. At this point, it will become difficult to make exceptions, or even basic rulings of any kind.

A MAN ON THE INSIDE

If you're just starting out, it can be unexpectedly hard to avoid thinking of the villains as 'your guys' and the player characters as 'their guys'.

For early GMs, we recommend creating an NPC (non-player character) who travels with the party. This figure shouldn't be in the same league as the other heroes (he shouldn't be Legolas the Great! see page p.3), but he helps connect them with the story. If the players come across a scene that should be horrifying, you can't rightly tell the players 'you guys are horrified' but you can express the reaction of the NPC.

More importantly, this serves as a link between you and the players. It helps keep you in the 'same team' mindset by requiring you to constantly pick up the thread of a party member to decide what they should do or how they should react. This will help you spot a lot of unintentional bias you might otherwise introduce.

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DON'T HIDE BEHIND THE DICE

If the players want to do something far-fetched, it's common to make a difficult check requirement (if it were easy everyone would be doing it), but keep two things in mind:

Difficulty is dependent on the task, not the player
If something requires more strength than a human could muster, the difficulty should be 20 to 25, not 35. Even if the attempting (heavily augmented) character will find a 20 fairly achievable.

Asking for multiple roles forces failure
Where one roll might have only a 25% chance of failure, asking for three successful rolls versus the same difficulty, has almost a 60% chance of failure.

The best thing to do if you spot yourself using either of the above behaviours is ask yourself why. Most likely some plot or character element is at stake, and you feel protective of it. Often knowing this is enough to let it go and give the players a fair chance.

If it's not, refer to when things go really wrong p.79.

PASS UNDER DURESS

There are plenty of things players may want to do that seem okay in the circumstance but may set worrying precedents for later.

In such circumstances, make the ruling appropriate to the here and now, but stress that you've provided a very liberal interpretation of the rules and that you may have to switch back later.

This is also useful when you need to override a long-established rule that no longer works. It's better to say, "For _____ reason, this is the last time I'll allow this" than to spring a sudden ban on your players.

DEATH OF A HERO

Your players should rightly become very attached to their characters over the course of a campaign. As a GM it's important that you respect and encourage this bond.

This can be difficult to balance with the need to keep the sessions exciting. Strong combat requires a sense of peril, and if the players feel like their avatars are immortal, then combat will lose its edge.

Before signing on for the *Star Wars* prequels, Samuel Jackson allegedly required only that his character not die like 'some punk'. This is a useful lens to apply to any potential player character death.

Most players don't want their character to die slipping off a roof because they failed an *acrobatics* check. By contrast, players will sometimes *choose* an action knowing full well it will lead to death because they know it will also stop the villain/save the party etc.

As the GM, you have a huge number of tools at your disposal for keeping characters alive. You decide who the villains shoot, you decide the difficulty of an unlucky player's *react* check to grab the edge of a roof rather than fall to her death. You decide whether a broad interpretation of a particular talent might allow the player to dodge that fatal bullet or not.

The players will help with this as well. Most groups, sensing that a hero is slipping away, will drop what they're doing to come to their rescue. All of this, combined with an escalation in the intensity of description, can turn an inauspicious death into a nail-biting close shave – or a truly memorable last stand.

Keep an eye on wounds tolerance
It is very unlikely for characters in *Wireless Soul Transmission* to die from a single hit while they have fewer wounds than their wounds tolerance. Once they've lost their wounds, this changes the dynamic significantly; for then, any given hit could be fatal.

This is the point where you should start going into a little more detail on your description. Make it clear that the wounded hero is fighting on despite serious injury, pull out all the stops to make them seem *more* heroic. Every extra hit they suffer should be played out in detail, every villain they take down should be an attack hit home despite adversity.

This change in tone will alert the other characters to get involved and pull that character out of danger.

One of two things will happen. Most often, the players will succeed despite adversity and feel pumped up by their brush with death. Less often, that player will be downed and perhaps even die, but if you've done everything right, there will have been enough excitement and intensity between hitting their wounds tolerance, and their final death, that they don't feel like 'some punk'.

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WRITING GOOD COMBAT

Combat is likely to be a common feature of most *Wireless Soul Transmission* campaigns so it's important to put just as much effort into making it great as you do the story. There are many components to a good fight, and every group is looking for something different, but the below should give you a sound starting point.

BINARY STORYTELLING

One hallmark of good combat in fiction is that it should always be about the fight, plus at least one other thing, often something about the world or its characters.

If the players are 'fighting to defend an arcology' you have an interesting battle that could be dotted with interesting tactical choices. By itself, though, this misses an opportunity to do more with its setting.

Consider that the arcologies think themselves impregnable. Such a defence gives you an opportunity to demonstrate how wrong that might be. Rather than simple swarms of berserkers, you could have the arcology defences turn on their inhabitants. The behaviour of those inhabitants themselves would add layers of drama to the fight. Employees freezing up in terror, ginbushi knuckling down to meet an ending they expected for a long time as the executives attempt to preserve critical records and flee to safety.

Killing a handful of berserkers on the steps of an arcology is unlikely to be memorable. Seeing a way of life come undone as a part of that fight *is*.

Once you know the story you want to tell, this can inform all of the decisions to follow, allowing you to choose elements for reasons of both tactical interest and epic drama.

OBJECTIVE

When designing a battle, you should ensure that both the players and their opponents have an objective. The objectives need not be complex, but the players' mission shouldn't always boil down to 'kill all the enemies'.

Likewise, the enemy shouldn't always be simply trying to kill all of the players. In most cases, the enemy will be on the defensive, but what are they defending?

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Having a clear picture of the enemy's intention can add character to their defence.

Also consider asymmetric objectives. Perhaps the heroes have shown up to salvage an artefact but find themselves competing with another a group who believe the artefact should be destroyed.

SETTING

The setting for a battle is an opportunity to add significant interest or tension. Think back to the settings of your favourite fights from books, movies, and games.

Some elements to use:

- Settings that have meaning for the characters involved. Being called on to defend a base you helped build is a lot more meaningful.
- Settings with elements that can be involved in the fight. Ledges to throw enemies off of, hazards to push them into, or things to drop onto them all give the players fun options.
- Fight in the room, not the corridor. Try to ensure there is plenty of cover just inside the room so that the players don't feel compelled to linger in doorways. If you catch yourself designing a battle *in* a corridor, ask yourself if there's not somewhere better you can set it.
- Settings that are different. As always, you want to mix up the settings with original content. Have you ever seen a cyberpunk battle in a dog pound? Or trench warfare on a golf course? Don't make your game silly (unless that's your intent) but consider the unusual before settling for another battle in a pre-Shatter military base or dilapidated office block.

OPPONENTS

The most common agents of the Whisper are basic berserkers, and it doesn't hurt to include a good helping of these in most fights, but once they've been encountered once or twice, they're no longer interesting on their own.

Mix things up by adding in a suzerain, collector, banshee or other more complex opponent. Because the berserkers are a known quantity, they help establish the relative strength of the new opponent.

From time to time, you should throw out the rulebook completely and have the players fight a combination of completely unfamiliar opponents. Perhaps they'll be called on to confront foes that are not even agents of the Whisper but fellow survivors or a pre-Shatter defence system.

'BOSS' ENCOUNTERS

Veteran GMs from other systems should keep in mind the opponents in *Wireless Soul Transmission* do not have huge reserves of hit points. This means 'solo' boss encounters are the exception, rather than the rule.

Even in the middle of an army, an obvious leader can (and usually will) be easily overwhelmed by concentrated fire from your players. Don't be disappointed if this happens; it means you've successfully conveyed the idea that the villain is threatening and can't be ignored. Congratulate your players on their quick thinking after the fight and perhaps even share with then some of the terrible powers the villain would have unleashed if they hadn't been so quick on the draw

To give your set-piece opponents a bit of breathing space, consider having them enter the battle *after* the players have already fought a few rounds against their minions. This gives the villain at least one chance to show off their abilities and means some players may already be committed to other opponents and can't immediately concentrate fire on one foe. It also tips the scales on players who can fall into the expectation that the boss will patiently wait for them in a big square room at the very end of the dungeon.

The low tolerance for injury applies to the players too, so a villain with a beam rifle may only need a single round to demonstrate to the players that he's a dire threat.

The best idea is not to create a villain that so captures your imagination that you don't want him to die easily or be made a fool of. Players often make a point of embarrassing any opponent that appears before them on a pedestal (and allies aren't immune to this either).

REINFORCEMENTS

The opposition shouldn't fight alone. Nothing draws in berserkers like the sound of a gunshot in the middle of the night.

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Even when the players are being relatively discreet, remember that the lost are all networked. If the Whisper is paying enough attention to a location, it knows everything that any of its agents see, and can direct them accordingly.

Don't forget that the players can have reinforcements as well. Are their own allies monitoring the situation, and what will they do if it looks like the players are getting swarmed?

RETREAT AND SURRENDER

Try to avoid fights to the death. Many games and movies have a lazy habit of assuming all villains are prepared to fight to the last, but this doesn't reflect reality.

More importantly, an opponent willing to surrender can make for more powerful storytelling. Consider that the survivors are focused on living to see another day (as the name implies) and are more practiced at running than fighting. By contrast, the average berserker does not have enough intelligence to know when to quit. A suzerain likely won't accept your surrender, but a ginbushi will.

These elements add another layer of colour and difference between the sorts of opponents your players will face. You can further accentuate this by doing the unexpected. Could a suzerain retain enough sense of self to surrender? What would your players think if the tide of berserkers that was about to overwhelm them suddenly withdrew?

A retreating opponent is also a good way to reward players who come up with a really hard-hitting strategy. If they drive a tank through the front wall of a Furui Kiga workshop and immediately grenade the two adjoining rooms they would want to see their enemy driven before them. A lot of the time, the players should feel imperilled by the Whisper, but that doesn't mean that occasionally they can't become a force worthy of fear themselves.

As with reinforcements, don't forget to keep this option open to the players as well. In case a fight ever goes poorly, it doesn't hurt to keep in mind how the players might escape and how far the enemy will chase them. Players tend not to surrender, and it's a bad idea to assume they will, but if an encounter takes a turn for the worse, you could always suggest the option.

COMMON PITFALLS

There are a few easy mistakes to make when running combat in *Wireless Soul Transmission,* and even experienced GMs from other game systems can fall victim to these.

Pay attention to armour

Keep an eye on what sort of armour your villains are wearing and how it compares to the players' weapons. Remember, armour can completely negate attacks, so you could inadvertently include an opponent beyond the players' ability to harm.

The flip to this is true as well. You shouldn't equip all your villains with heavy rifles, but then, if the players are packing armada battle armour, the enemy should fall back unless it has weaponry to deal with it.

Be careful with blast and auto-fire weapons

Wounds tolerances keep the players in the fight against most weapons, but blast weapons and auto-fire weapons can really change that dynamic. Deployed carelessly, a single rocket could wipe out an entire party.

Don't completely avoid these weapons, but try not to field them in large numbers. Often a single rocket launcher on the field can be a huge tactical challenge for the players, or just a source of cold disquiet. Shortages of such weapons are easily explained – the Whisper is disinclined to setup an ammo logistics chain, and six years of use will have exhausted a lot of the pre-Shatter stockpiles.

Be careful with military-grade vehicles

The military-grade vehicles (the ones in this guide, as opposed to the *Play Guide*) combine both of the risks above. A ripple fire barrage of Apollo missiles from an Enforcer-D can create a field of death that the party simply can't escape.

Vehicle encounters should be planned carefully. Do you expect the players to fight, or run? If they're to fight, what means do they have to get a decisive first shot? Can they survive a return fire? If you expect them to run, how will they escape a speeding vehicle?

Remember that most vehicles have now gone six years without a scrap of maintenance. It's okay to limit some of their capabilities to reflect this. The Chevalier the players need to defeat might have a thrown tread, or its magnetic screen may no longer work. A Peacemaker

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may be out of Apollo missiles, or the targeting systems may no longer be accurate enough to hit player characters on foot.

In general, vehicles should be conservative about their weapons. A tank platoon won't immediately fire every weapon at their disposal against a single soldier in a building. Most vehicles have a variety of weapons in order to engage different kinds of opponent, not to create raw firepower.

Spread the love

Because all of the GM-controlled opponents go at the same time, you need to be mindful of how you concentrate your fire. If only one player is exposed, think carefully before having every opponent gun them down (especially if they moved first and didn't realise their so-called allies were going to leave them exposed). It's okay to have some bad guys advance and only a few engage the visible enemy.

This goes double when dealing with character weaknesses. Your suzerain shouldn't always pick on the augmented, even though you know he has the lowest IC defence. Equally the shotgun-wielding berserker shouldn't charge straight past an armoured ginbushi so they can shoot an unarmoured disconnected. Constantly targeting weaknesses have two effects.

1) The hero feels victimised and (with wireless attacks) often gets written out of the action.

2) The other characters who put all these resources in to better armour/defences, feel like it was wasted.

Certainly, you should target weakness some of the time, but save it for the really 'smart' enemies where you want to make a point about their cunning. The rest of the time let your enemies be twitchy about the closest opponent, or vengeful toward that sniper that just killed their buddy, or just plain lacking the omniscient battle awareness that you, as the GM, possess.

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WRITING WIRELESS SOUL TRANSMISSION COMBAT

There are certain elements to *Wireless Soul Transmission* that can make your battles totally unique. The following principles should be used liberally, but responsibly, to make your combat scenes truly memorable.

If you run it well, the characters in *Wireless Soul Transmissions* should feel like upstart mortals competing with the agents of a god. This makes their battles desperate and their victories epic.

AUGMENTED REALITY FIGMENTS

The single greatest asset you have for making fights more interesting is the Whisper's ability to alter the players' perceptions of reality. It can make a building appear to collapse when it hasn't or appear to be stable when it isn't. It can create a horde of enemies or hide them.

When messing with the players' perceptions, keep the following in mind:

Tie figments to a location
Because the players can never 'defeat' the figment (or at least not until they destroy the Whisper), it's important that there's a way to get out from under the figment. For this reason, it's best to have the illusions tied to a physical location. When the players leave, they know reality is 'back to normal'.

Make an attack roll versus each player's IC defence
Figments can be created by both the Ambient Whisper and by its agents. Unless the players have an adaptive firewall (see p. 57) the Ambient Whisper needn't make an attack roll and is just assumed to succeed. On the other hand a suzerain should have to make an attack roll with a bonus appropriate to the believability of the figment. This could be as high as a +12 modifier for mostly harmless changes (like hiding a non-critical door) and a several points lower for things that can directly injure players.

You need to be careful when making rolls against the players IC that you don't give away what's going on. Players are naturally suspicious when they're pretty sure a successful attack was made against their IC and they haven't been told what caused it. If a figment successfully takes, you need not make the player aware that they ever were attacked, so for novice GMs we recommend making the roll in secret. More experienced GMs should consider the techniques covered under 'repeatability'.

Figments *can* harm characters
If a character believes a pillar fell on them then, they'll believe they were injured, and the Whisper will manipulate their nervous system to make the pain real. Tell the player they've suffered a fracture (or whatever appropriate wound) but once they escape the figment these injuries should be revealed to be mental trauma instead.

Because metal trauma causes unconsciousness before death, and characters can no longer perceive figments once they're unconscious, they can never be *actually* killed by a figment alone.

Figments cannot harm machines
If the Whisper creates the figment that a hundred-ton boulder fell on a car, the car does not suffer any damage (not even engine trauma).

For this reason, the Whisper is more likely to make a driver perceive a road block or fuel leak, than a piano falling on the engine block.

Of course, in most cases the Whisper can also just take over the car…

Characters can dodge illusory hazards
The Whisper's figments are bound by believability and, therefore, physics. A pillar can fall on a character, but that character gets a *react* check to dodge out of the way as they would with a normal pillar.

Figments must be believable
The more difficult it is to believe a fiction, the easier it is for characters to reject. Even at full power, the Whisper would find it almost impossible to render an outright contradiction (gravity reverses, water is solid at room temperature, etc.).

Figments affect the mind not the senses
The Whisper makes you *believe* you've seen a thing and lets your brain produce the subsequent sensory input. This is important because when the disconnected says,

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"that fire's not real…", the afflicted players will hear *look out, there's a fire….* If a disconnected walks into the fire, the affected characters will believe they are screaming as they burn alive.

Only direct contradictions provide players with an opportunity to make a *resist* check versus figments, and the Whisper should make every effort to prevent that from occurring.

This isn't to say that unaffected characters cannot help their allies. They simply have to find a circumspect approach, an argument that would get the appropriate outcome without relying on dispelling the Whisper's fiction.

Repeatability

Your first figment is your best shot at giving the players a unique experience, so make it count. That said even once the players know the Whisper can create widescale illusions you have opportunities to transfer figments from a tactical challenge to a psychological one.

The most important thing here is to get inside the players heads to the point where they can *know* their IC was just successfully attacked and be jumping at every shadow while they try to understand what's really going on. Even if you're not rolling against their IC (ie ambient whisper) you can talk up the volume of the Whisper, describe visual glitches and other effects that leave the players certain that something is up.

Some strategies for repeating figments:

- Change the nature of the illusion: If your first figment was a huge widescale change (like the Inferno figment later in this book) then your players will be expecting similar. If your second figment takes place *during* a flood, but the flood itself is real, the players will be jumping to the wrong conclusions.
- Separate the roll from the figment: If there is a figment on the third floor of the building, don't wait until the players reach it to make the roll. Make your attacks vs IC before they even enter the building or better still when they step into the elevator. Most groups will be so caught up examining the lift they'll be caught off guard by the real figment later.
- Use innocuous figments: The players will tend to assume that the Whisper is out to kill them. If you create a figment of something harmless, but clearly out of place, your players will tiptoe around it to no particular advantage. Consider the impact of the players encountering a cat in the lobby of an abandoned arcology just after knowing they've been hacked. Make the cat friendly, have it follow them but, and this is key, it *never* harms them or delays them in any way.

Don't over use it

Remember that the players need to be able to make rational choices based on what they encounter. If half of everything they see is imaginary, the players will feel like you're always setting them up for a fall.

We found augmented reality figments were a great way to demonstrate something was important to the Whisper's greater objectives. It gives the sense of a titanic force literally warping reality in an effort to stop them.

PLAYER KNOWLEDGE VERSUS CHARACTER KNOWLEDGE

The divide between what *players* know and what *characters* know will never be more important than when the Whisper starts throwing around figments. Even a single disconnected in the party means someone will always know the truth.

Obviously, players shouldn't be allowed to take actions that rely on information their character doesn't have, but it's almost impossible to defeat the instinct to try (your character doesn't know the water is electrified, so you still want to swim in it right?).

We found it helps a lot to describe the scene from the perspective of those who *are* affected by the figment first and insist they provide their actions before you reveal what the rest of the party saw. This gets players in the habit right away of taking actions based on their 'best guess' of what's real. Remember they can't 'wait to see what the disconnected does' because from their perspective the disconnected's behaviour will seem to reinforce the figment.

One final caveat: try not to create situations of forced damage. If your notes read 'and then the players swim across the water that they don't realise is electrified' then you're likely to get into a fight with the players. If they say, 'we knock down a column to make a bridge' your first instinct shouldn't be 'but you wouldn't do that, you'd step in the electrified water'. Keep in mind that players can use wild and unexpectedly elaborate solutions to problems at the best of times, who are you to say what their unbiased intentions would have been?

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

MAKING INJURIES EXCITING

The wounds system used in *Wireless Soul Transmission* is immediately more engaging than the simple hit points you might be familiar with from most games. Knowing a character has a sucking chest wound gives a weight to the game that losing 25 hit points does not.

You can make these rules work even harder for you by adding small flourishes when characters are seriously injured. Having a character who suffers a crippling wound to the eyes be staggering around blind, or a character with a shattered calf unable to walk and need to be carried from the field, will take your combat to the next level.

We provide some guides below, but there's no one way to do this. Any time you add a complication to a wound it's one more thing the players need to remember, so pay attention to the circumstance and the players. In a highly complex fight with many heroes and opponents, it might be best to keep the dressings to a minimum. On the other hand, in a duel between two long-time rivals, you shouldn't be afraid to add detail to every wound.

Wound Category

Wounds are divided into four categories minor, serious, severe and maiming. The severity of the wound should be your first call about whether you want there to be any significant impact.

WOUND CATEGORIES

CATEGORY	MECHANICAL IMPACT
Minor	Usually none. Any impacts should be limited and immediate (so you don't have to keep track of them)
Serious	Most *serious* injuries should only have basic description. Injuries to a critical area (eyes, neck, etc.) are candidates for additional impact. While these may have lasting ramifications, try to keep them limited to a round or two.
Severe	*Severe* injuries should generally have consequences that last until healed (or at least the end of the encounter). These should significantly hobble the character.
Maiming	As above, but these injuries are a lot more permanent, requiring replacement limbs/ organs, etc. to heal. A *maimed* character should have difficulty operating effectively on their own.

Damage Type and Hit Location

No weapon deals a 'serious' wound in *Wireless Soul Transmission* – instead it deals a lacerating wound or a fracturing wound. This damage result, combined with the hit location, gives you a powerful starting point. Often knowing that a character's forearm has been immolated will make the players cringe enough that you don't need to add anything.

If you do want to add additional effects (especially mechanical ones) consider the wound damage type and what its ramifications might be combined with the hit location. You don't need to be a doctor to guess that a lacerated neck would bleed quite a bit, but a burned neck, while it sounds painful, seems unlikely to have further consequences.

Some combinations don't seem to make as much sense – fractured guts for instance. Since there's no bones in that area, it's reasonable to assume that the hit, though bruising and nausea inducing, won't have significant complications. Use your judgement on this, though; a shattering injury to the kidney sounds horrific, bones or no bones.

William Kwan (Quiet 36187234)

Wounds Tolerance and Armour

If you want to be particularly fancy, consider whether the victims wounds tolerance or armour played a role in your description. A lacerated shoulder isn't great, but if it was *going* to be cleaved off entirely that warrants a mention.

Generally, a character who had enough wounds tolerance to reduce the wound has dodged out of the way with heroic speed. By contrast, armour means the hit connected, perhaps solidly, but the padding/plating absorbed the force.

EXAMPLES

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION (*MECHANICAL IMPACT*)
Cleaved Neck	You smoothly decapitate the target, flicking your blade out to the side as the head rolls to the ground (instant death)
Clipped Head	You stagger back as the cyborgs steel fist makes contact with your cheek on the way through. (*move back one square*)
Burned Heart (reduced by armour)	A white-hot bolt of energy snaps from your rifle to the target, tagging him right in the heart. It checks his step and steam from his ablating armour partially obscures his grimace of pain… but he doesn't fall, his armour held.
Punctured Eye (reduced by wounds tolerance)	The tantō thrusts at your head and you jerk your head sideways just in time to avoid losing an eye. The blade tip catches you in the eyebrow and skates an agonising line across your forehead (*1d6 disadvantage to rolls next round as you swipe blood out of your vision*)

Loss of Limb

When applying mechanical penalties for a lost limb, a light touch is often best. By the time a player has lost and arm or a leg, the group will probably either be in retreat or fighting a desperate last stand. In either instance, a character passing their shock checks to stay in the fight should be heroic, not further hobbled by negative modifiers (even if that would be the reality).

In most instances, it is enough to simply disallow the use of two-handed weapons (for a lost arm) or force a character to lose the ability to move and act in the same round, or to long dash (for a lost leg).

This is not to say you should allow players to take advantage of your generosity. If the wounded player seems quite content to push further into the enemy camp despite having their arm torn off, it's time to start applying other penalties. For almost any limb loss applying at least 1d6 disadvantage to all rolls is a reasonable start. If they're having trouble getting the point, you could even have this disadvantage worsen by another 1d6 every round as the adrenalin subsides and their body begins to protest this unreasonable treatment.

DON'T DISTURB THE LOST

Throughout their adventures, the players should come across large numbers of lost (they outnumber the survivors by over twenty to one), but most lost aren't berserkers. The flipside to that coin is all lost are *potentially* berserkers.

As a GM, it's important to recognise that lost do more to unsettle the players as *potential* berserkers than actual berserkers. The berserker is a quantifiable threat, while a room full of lost is open to the players imagination.

In order to preserve this sense, we recommend you discourage the players from attacking the lost in three key ways:

If you attack them, they'll all turn.

Attacking one lost should cause all nearby lost to immediately become berserkers and descend on the players. If your heroes are well enough equipped that this doesn't seem concerning, then escalate (see the next section for more on that).

If you don't attack them, they'll leave you alone.

If your lost always go feral the moment the heroes' backs are turned, you can reasonably expect the players to massacre every lost they encounter.

When the players arrive at a new location, the berserkers you expect them to fight should *already* be berserkers. Unless the players attack them, the lost in that location should stay lost.

Maybe they can be saved.

For most players, practicality will always override morality. That said, it's a good idea to establish that the lost were once people and, if we can deal with the Whisper, might be able to become people again. Almost every survivor knows at least a few lost who used to be family or friends.

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THERE'S ALWAYS A BIGGER FISH

While berserkers are the most common threat, they are far from the only weapon in the Whisper's arsenal. The survivors can't fight the Whisper in a stand-up engagement, no matter what resources they've scrounged.

When the players are first starting out, collectors should be among their greatest fears. Until the players get access to a rocket launcher, a collector represents an opponent they simply cannot fight.

But of course, once they've got a rocket launcher, the Whisper has Peacemaker drones. And where that fails, it has an aerostat, and where that fails it has a warship and so on.

Don't constantly throw the players into fights they can't win, but don't be afraid to remind them that they'll never win an arms race versus the Whisper.

DON'T FIGHT IN THE STREETS

With scores of berserkers in the alleys and Peacemakers overhead, "don't fight in the streets" is a catechism of the survivors. The sound of a gunshot carries, and it's too easy to get pinned down by swarms of berserkers and then finished off by a Peacemaker.

Survivors moving through the city are either attempting to stay undetected or to break contact with their opponents as quickly as possible. Nobody 'digs in' against the Whisper.

If the heroes do get in a fight somewhere (even in a building), you should encourage them to wrap up their business as quickly as possible. The Whisper doesn't respond every time a berserker is gunned down, but there's no way to know if it'll respond *this time*.

Doing this helps to keep the tension up and encourage decisive action by the players.

DON'T TRUST THE AUGMENTED, ESPECIALLY IF IT'S YOU

Many of the Whisper's agents have the capacity to mind-hack augmented individuals to varying extents. Using these effects not only improves the game, but it is important in order to balance the heavily augmented against those who are not.

Consider the following when using mind-hacks to improve your game.

Source
Technically anyone, anywhere, should be able to mind-hack a character, after all that's how networks operate. In practice, whenever the players are struck by an unseen adversary, they feel like it's the GM attacking them, and not the Whisper.

For that reason, it's best to require line of sight for most Wireless attacks. Banshees and suzerains should be the most common platform for such attacks.

Effect
Mind-hacks can be anything from a mild nuisance to the Whisper taking complete control, and it's best to use a variety. Total domination might be the most effective attack a villain can use, but remember, your goal is to make the fight interesting, not defeat the heroes.

Victim
Don't forget augmented allies, or even bystanders and lost, can be affected by the Whisper. Also remember that allies are just as leery of the players 'turning' as players are of them.

Played right, a heavily armed and armoured ally can be a complex mix of reassuring and unsettling.

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"ERA OF GLOBAL CONFLICT"

EXCERPT FROM CRUEL DEMOGRAPHICS BY JAWAHAR PATEL

Nations responded to food shortages in a variety of different ways. Some overturned long-standing industry, even residential developments, to reclaim farmland. Most adopted some form of population control. At some point almost all resorted to force.

The phrase 'Era of Global Conflict' popularly defines the 2030s and 2040s and it warrants some deconstruction. This wasn't 'Capitalists vs Communists' or even 'the US against China' or any form of World War III previously envisioned. These were *conflicts*, not wars. Undeclared skirmishes, often initiated well below the national level. Some cases would see a single military base commander raid rationing warehouses in a neighbouring country to provide for his local region.

Inevitably things got worse. Some national governments felt compelled to support the actions of rogue commanders. In other places those same rogue elements realised their parent nations warehouses were easier targets than those across a patrolled border. All this of course atop food riots and burgeoning farmers militia groups.

The nation states had not yet failed, but they were driven almost entirely by necessity and that necessity created a staccato sequence of regional conflicts.

AWETECH-9

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

PART III

STORY BLOCKS

In this part you'll find a collection of 'Story Blocks': these are fleshed out locations, characters, and challenges that you can use in your game. It's up to you whether these will serve as time savers, dropped directly into your campaign 'as is', or just as a starting point to inspire and develop your own ideas. Besides the elements included in this section, in Part IV p.155 you'll find a full-session write-up that you can use to kick off your campaign or use like any other story block.

READING THE STORY BLOCKS

Every GM needs different prompts and cues to help them develop a great story, so it's worth taking time to identify different story elements and prompts.

Read Aloud

Sections on a shaded background like this are intended to be read or paraphrased. If you're new to GMing, we recommend reading them (one less bit of thinking you have to do on your feet), but as you get more experienced at gauging the mood at the table, you'll be able to tell when the time is right to gloss over detail and get to the action.

Origin Opportunity

This icon is accompanied by some short prompts on how one or more of the origins might be included. We can't realistically provide full detail for all twenty possible origins, but these should serve as indicative examples.

Thoughts and Motivations

This icon is accompanied by a few details on a character's thoughts and motivations. If the scene goes as planned, you might not need them, but these are very useful in understanding how a character might react to unexpected player actions.

These sections frequently also include the favoured *virtue* or *vice* for a character. Remember a *virtue* can be circumstance-dependant, and in any case, we encourage you to try and make at least one party-member's particular capabilities relevant wherever possible, regardless of what we have written.

Also keep in mind that a character's vice might be evident to a greater, or lesser, degree during their daily work. Just because a character has 'one-for-the-road' doesn't mean they're an alcoholic who is drunk all the time. They *might* be, but equally a character who 'lives-for-luxury' might simply lament the absence of such things from their life, even while acknowledging their current circumstance demands a spartan existence. In either case a player character who shares their passion could clearly use this to relate.

Fun and Games

The universe of *Wireless Soul Transmission* can be a dark place, but after too long without counterpoint, even the post-apocalypse can become monotonous. Worse still, the depressive atmosphere the characters are enduring can bleed out to the players.

For that reason, we've put a few elements in that are intended to lighten the mood. We do also understand that some groups are looking for an unbroken soul crushing experience of endless tragedy, so this icon is a warning and explanation of up-coming elements that might be a little more tongue in cheek and not appropriate to all games.

Skill Check

This icon indicates a skill check. Unless otherwise specified, checks are always described from the players' perspective. The Blue die also describes what occurs on success.

If the ramifications of failure aren't immediately evident, a red die will be included to describe failure effects.

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Characters

Since we don't know exactly how you'll want to use the characters we've included, we provide detailed backgrounds and full stat blocks for most. This should be far more information than you'll need for any reasonable usage, but we hope it will both provide inspiration for new stories, and flexibility if you face the unexpected.

The stat blocks we use for characters in these sections are fairly self explanatory, but we do go into a little detail on them on p.246.

Handouts

Giving players material to read helps draw them into the game and gives you a chance to rest your voice. Handouts all have a serial number, so you know you're giving out the right one.

Note that the handouts are available in the appendix for easier printing and are also included at the end of their story block so the GM can quickly reference them.

UNIQUE TALENTS AND GEAR VS THE BORDERLESS PRINCIPLES

Some characters in the story blocks will have unique talents and/or equipment. While these help add to the characters sense of style and depth they do violate the spirit of the borderless principles.

For example – if Li Wei has acquired a modified riot control weapon then why can't a player?

The key here is they can, *but they should get it from this character*.

Signature training can be shared, signature weapons can be gifted. Even a talent used by a villain might become available to a hero to learn once they've had it used on them. Or perhaps they can only learn it once they've overcome that villain.

You can apply requirements. If an ability is supposed to be the rare act of a legendary blade master it stands to reason it wouldn't become available until tier 4. Equally an act of deep meditation might have a minimum willpower requirement.

It's up to you how you make these available to the players, but its important that you *do* make them available. Don't parade a super useful skill in front of the heroes and then tell them that they'll never be legendary enough to learn it. By the end of the heroes story no one should out-legend them.

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EDDINGS PARK

The below should be read on arrival, assuming the players are familiar with Eddings Park (eg it's they're home and their returning to it). If you players are arriving as guests, or even possible enemies, you should familiarise yourself with the Gatehouse section later in this chapter.

Eddings Park is a large inner-city park that has been converted into farmland. The road that once circled the park is now cluttered with tents, lean-tos, and other shacks and shanties, while most actual buildings fronting onto the park have been intentionally collapsed to create a wall of rubble around the settlement.

It's a place that is only ever a few days from disaster, the farming is hardscrabble and insufficient to feed its people, so salvage runs are a necessity to trade with the arcologies for food and medicine. A hazy hologram reaches over the park from an aging generator in the middle, and the fear is that, if it ever fails, Peacemaker drones will descend to tear the settlement apart.

But for all that, its people have a tenacious happiness to them. The Whisper isn't as loud as it was when things first fell apart, and people have come to praise Ren for his controversial decision to welcome the augmented into the settlement. As the acceptance of the otherwise outcast augmented grew, they began to bring back more from their salvage raids than just trinkets for trading with the arcologies. Games, music, holovids, and books started to flow into the colony, and people stopped surviving and started to live again.

Its prosperity is also its weakness. When it was first founded, the entire population of Eddings Park could have relocated in a matter of minutes – to do so today would be a labour of hours and much would have to be abandoned. The outer wall has been fortified, the sentries kept well drilled, but in the end, will it matter? When the Whisper decides to take what it wants, whoever has been able to hold it back?

At this point, the GM should mention the locations the players can investigate (or, if they're here to meet someone specifically, just cut straight to that location). Make it clear to the players that this is a safe space and that it's okay for them to split up.

SAFE AREA ACTIONS

Generally, when players are in a safe location, you should establish a number of actions that they can take before events/quests will call on them to leave again. An action could be visiting any location; making a buy or sell check at the market; engaging in personal projects like scratch building gear; training an NPC follower, or anything else that needs a safe area or significant time investment.

We recommend you allow three or four actions each. If you have an idea of how much in-world time must pass until the next quest, then there should be a relationship, but this is flexible. If the players know they only have twenty-four hours before leaving, then it's reasonable to assume they knuckle down to get a lot done; in which case that could reasonably preform three actions all in one day. On the other hand, if they know they've got a couple weeks off, they're going to take it easy, catch up with friends, fix up their home, train, and so forth – in this case, they might only get one action a day. The heroes are absolutely committed, but when there's nothing to hero, there's no reason to work yourself to the bone.

DEMOGRAPHICS

CATEGORY	%	NUMBER
Children* *(1–13 years old)*	7%	74
Whisper Orphans *(13–20 years old)*	56%	596
Disconnected *(21 years and older)*	16%	170
Connected** *(21 years and older)*	15%	159
Augmented** *(21 years and older)*	6%	64
Total		**1063**

** There are children born in the village who are between one and five years old, as well as Whisper Orphans who are too young to work (ten- to twelve-year-olds). The latter is the largest group. There are almost no children between six and nine as these were infants when the Shatter began – or were born in the chaotic first year – in any event they had a near-zero survival rate.*

*** As a rare safe haven for their kind, Eddings Park has a volume of augmented well above the normal density. Connected are tolerated, but discouraged.*

William Kwan (Quo: 36187234)

History

In one form or another, Eddings Park has been around since less than a month after the Shatter. A survivalist had moved into town and was fortifying a building on the edge of the park when Master Ren found them. Ren convinced the individual that, should they allow Ren to move a group of other survivors into the shadow of the tower, the survivors would share food, materials, and even labour with the occupant.

The survivalist agreed, and with time, and a few false starts, the settlement found its feet and eventually prospered. To this day, the survivalist's tower is considered the lynch-pin of the park's defence and its occupant the foremost authority on security.

The original survivalist is represented by Mr. Nordstrom (Old Man Bunny-Killer from p.83 in the *Play Guide*); however, if you have a disconnected in your party, consider letting them fill this roll instead. Heroes with the Woodsman origin in your party, or even an augmented Obsolete or a system guardian with the Guardian of the People origin, would be a most appropriate candidate to be tied into the village's history.

THE MARKET

In one corner of the colony a triangular shade covers a makeshift market square. Here people trade and barter for their wants and needs. There are no hawkers here and most stall workers busy themselves with fixing up future goods in between their customers

The *urbcraft* difficulty to find most items is 15.

Feel free to add or subtract 5 for items you feel would be particularly rare or common.

Rather than letting players buy upgrades for weapons/armour here, we recommend sending them to Li Wei's workshop.

The below items should *not* be available:

Weapons: EMP grenades, frag grenades, pulse guns, RPGs and Artemis launchers.

Armour: infiltrator armour, dō-maru, delta armour, armada battle armour

Equipment: All poisons except emetic, knockout, and neurotoxin.

MASTER RENALDO "REN" TORVIAN – THE STOCKS

Master Ren is a hefty man in his forties whose position as head of Eddings Park has somehow come to be symbolised by the ancient train conductor's cap he wears. When not in his role of mediating disputes, he works at the village stocks, keeping track of the ever-tenuous supply of food and medicine kept in a dry basement.

Master Ren's primary service for the players will be as a quest giver and as an occasional voice of reason.

Master Ren is idealistic enough to be charismatic and jaded enough to be pragmatic. He knows he is neither a hero nor a general, so he counts on others to solve the Whisper while he focuses on making sure enough people survive it that humanity doesn't wind up extinct.

With the settlement largely stable, Master Ren is instinctively cautious of change. He is not averse to risking small groups of his people for reasonable benefit, but as the number of people in the village increased, his appetite for acts that risked the settlement itself decreased.

Favoured Virtue: Academic

Favoured Vice: Den-of-cards

The Stocks – Layout

When Eddings Park collapsed the buildings along its circumference, only a handful were left intact. One was the stocks, located in the middle of the north approach. The ground floor of this building was once a green grocery, and the basement is a large dry store with a number of cold rooms.

While the basement level has remained largely unchanged, the ground floor has been converted into a distribution centre where Ren and his assistants ensure food and medicine is sensibly rationed.

Since this building only faces into the park, its upper floors are still used as a residential space. Ren and a few other village luminaries have permanent billets. The remaining homes are awarded by lottery – every settler gets a ticket, but additional tickets can be won for acts of sacrifice that benefit the settlement.

One room on the top floor is a shrine to those who gave their lives to preserve the settlement, their names laser cut into a sheet of military-grade tungsten.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

History

One of the secrets to Eddings Park's success is Master Ren's background as a civic planner. While not all of his skills were transferrable, he knew how much water and food people required and how much waste they produced. He also had access to significant maps of the city's infrastructure.

The secret of Ren's Augmentation

That Master Ren is augmented is a secret known only to a few. While scanners can detect subtle cerebral augmentation like Ren's, most survivors have simply defaulted into the assumption that he was a disconnected. Those paranoid enough to scan such a respected figure were either brought in on the secret or manoeuvred into positions where they would be unlikely to ever get access to a scanner. In six years, there has only been one individual who slipped through both cases, and they were killed by Cairo.

After years of augmented being a part of the settlement, it is likely that Ren's secret would be accepted, in and of itself. The fact that he *kept* that secret for years from the majority of the settlement would be less tolerated, however; and so knowledge of his augmentation remains privileged information.

LI WEI'S WORKSHOP

The workshop is located under a long roof of sheet metal jutting out from a standing wall on the park's western edge. Industrial shelves scattered with miscellaneous machine junk line the wall. Opposite the shelves are rows of workbenches where Li Wei and her apprentices restore, salvage, and often invent tools and devices to improve life in Eddings Park.

Li Wei herself is a mousy-faced mechanic of Chinese ancestry with dyed red hair and a rag stuffed into the back of her jeans that trails out like a motley tail as she moves about her workshop. There are many tinkers in Eddings Park, but despite her youth and limited formal teaching, Li Wei is the most talented. Perhaps more importantly, she is a friend.

Li Wei doesn't go out and fight, but ideally your players will see her as a critical part of their team. I recommend you earmark at least one of the artefact items (see p. 192) as a gift that Li Wei will give the players to help them out, ideally something that indicates she has been paying attention to the players' upcoming quests and anticipated something they might need. This gift should be given freely, not as a reward for a quest and not because she has any direct interest in their next mission. The players are her friends, and she wants them to succeed.

Background

Li Wei was a student of an expensive preparatory school geared to grooming high schoolers for joining Aratayo Technology University's micro-electronics program. She was at school when the Shatter hit and stayed in the Blinds through the chaos that followed, making ingenious traps and counting on her father to rescue her.

Her father, Li Fu, was head of the fabrication division of Ootori Syndicate, but the arcology was put into lockdown. By the time he was able to leverage his influence to send a search party, Li Wei had moved on.

For her part, Li Wei had only half of what she needed to be a consummate survivor. Her traps, fortifications, and escape tunnels served her and many of the other students well, but unfortunately, they also elevated her to a de facto leadership position. A cerebral child, Li Wei had no experience providing her own food and medical needs, let alone those of some hundred fourteen to seventeen-year-olds. Her position as leader lasted barely a week before food and water shortages either had the children at one another's throats or breaking out to make it alone.

Deciding she was doing more harm than good, Li Wei gave the defences a final update and then fled. Hungry and ill-equipped, Li Wei probably wouldn't have survived the winter that followed, but she fell in with Magnolia (then known as Doctor Nakamura, p.107). In the year they spent together, Li Wei learned a lot about engineering and robotics, while Nakamura learned that this child had no medical talent whatsoever and was a menace around patients. Around the time Li Wei started 'reverse engineering' critical medical equipment, Nakamura decided enough was enough. She gave the young adult some supplies and pointed her in the direction of Eddings Park.

The still-recent settlement of Eddings Park proved to be a great match for the prodigy engineer. Initially apprenticed to one of the settlements other tinkers, Li Wei quickly proved herself superior to anyone in the camp, and likely many beyond. She continued to insist on dismantling everything she could find, but her colleagues learnt to keep her supplied with enough new salvage that she wouldn't dismantle the Sat Blanket or the settlement's electrical transformer.

William Kwan (Order: 36187234)

When the settlement was large enough, Li Wei was able to talk Ren into rescuing the other Whisper Orphans from the Blinds. Their number had decreased significantly since Li Wei left, and not all were willing to leave, but many of the park's brightest young minds were collected in this effort.

As far as Li Wei is concerned, she doesn't have a past. Since no one came for her, she's concluded her family died in the Shatter, and Nakamura's surgery was destroyed by the Whisper just days after she left. Those she knew from school have either died or followed her to Eddings Park.

So now, Li Wei just likes to tinker and build, and see her creations be put to good use helping the village. She gets very excited about significant challenges, and quickly bored by menial tasks.

She is wilfully unaware of the politics of the settlement and the world beyond. She stays in Eddings Park because she believes the people there are fundamentally good, and her own experiences have undermined any confidence in her own leadership.

If confronted by actions she finds morally objectionable (theft, murder, etc.), she will be compelled to take action, and her slightly hyperactive personality means she doesn't always consider the consequences first.

Favoured Virtue: Genuine

Favoured Vice: Hoarder

CHILDREN'S CRECHE – CORMA

One thing Eddings Park has that the other settlements in the city do not, is a future. Outside of the arcologies, no other band of survivors can claim to have seen a child born.

During the working day some seventy children, from infants to preteens, are in the care of Corma, the three-metre-tall Brandonian quadruped. Some of these children were born into Eddings Park, others found or even arrived under their own power after the Whisper.

Whether it is because he is kind and gentle or simply because he is big and alien, the teacher and foster parent has a magnetism to the children, and they hang off his giant limbs and words in equal measure.

The creche is predominantly a 'point of interest', so don't wave it in your players' faces the first time they arrive. You should certainly mention that it exists, and if a player wishes to visit it, you should absolutely do it justice. Different groups will have different levels of interest in the plight of post-Whisper children.

Beyond that, the creche is a logical destination if the players ever recover a foundling or otherwise need advice on dealing with children. Corma is also a wealth of general pre-Shatter knowledge.

The Creche

The creche is comprised of a nursery, and several activity areas. The nursery is one of the largest tents in the village. The sealing is well maintained, and a climate control system moderates temperature for those inside.

Once they reach four or five years of age, the children are no longer allowed in the nursery. The activity areas can be fairly ad hoc, but they are always outdoor locations not too close to anything dangerous.

Corma also takes groups of older children to see the different activities of the settlement, practical education being carefully balanced with pre-Shatter knowledge. Very rarely the children are also briefly taken outside the walls, though never out of sight of them.

Once children hit thirteen or fourteen years old, they 'age out' of the creche and are expected to pull their weight in the village.

Corma's Background

Corma is quite old. In his time, he's served on explorer ships, helped flagging imperial colonies with education, designed a training syllabus for Raker construction and finally retired.

Unusually intelligent for his species, Corma never took to augmentation. His natural strength and survival skills learned early in his life meant he was well prepared to deal with the initial fallout of the Whisper. By the time Ren heard of his survival, Corma had already gathered a small cadre of survivors around him. Ren and Corma had been connected through a mutual friend (who was herself lost in the Shatter).

Species Notes

Brandonians are one of the largest sapient races in the galaxy. Heavyset aliens covered in downy fur, they possess a muscular, humanoid torso atop a quadrupedal lower half. Their forelegs are significantly longer than their hind legs, and a large flat tail further helps rebalance their weight across both sets of legs.

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Though Corma is hardly interested in being a revolutionary voice, he does believe that the people of Eddings Park should do more to understand – and ultimately stop – the Whisper. This position comes from the realisation that the children of Eddings Park are going to inherit a very broken world if the current generation doesn't act soon.

Corma is conscious that, due to their size, his people are frequently seen as a military asset. Though not a coward per se, Corma believes his talents lie elsewhere and does not wish to become pigeon holed as a 'walking tank'. It is for this reason that Corma is perhaps the only member of Eddings Park that does not carry a weapon. Certainly, his hands make the effective use of normal firearms an impossibility, but he has refused repeated offers by Li Wei and the other tinkers to make the necessary modifications.

Favoured Virtue: Humble

Favoured Vice: Socialite

THE GATEHOUSE

While there are many subtle entrances to Eddings Park, most are only fit for one or two individuals to squeeze through at a time and can be easily sealed in an attack.

The settlements only large entrance is at an overpass in the south call the 'gatehouse'. Beneath the overpass a pneumatically articulated door can open a gap in the rubble wall wide enough to admit even large vehicles. Guards are stationed on the overpass 24/7 with a ready stock of pulse guns and RPGs.

The gatehouse makes an ideal setting if you want a set piece battle for the defence of Eddings Park. The overpass creates a natural battlement the players can defend.

Your players may also wish to bring the wrecking ball to bear on their enemies, in which case use the below template:

Wrecking Ball			
Range: Medium		AP: Steel	
Clipped	Fractured [1]	Shattered [2–3]	Pulverised [4–6]
Blast [15] Attacks with the wrecking ball should be made using the *drive* skill.			

The overpass itself is vulnerable to being outflanked on the southwest side (which nominally acts as an additional entrance). If the park is ever attacked in force a span of the overpass is already rigged with explosives to properly isolate the gatehouse.

Anyone on the overpass when the explosives detonate is killed immediately unless they are a heroic character. Heroic characters suffer two wounds, one charred and one pulverised, to separate random hit locations. They may use wounds tolerance to reduce these but in either case will be trapped in the rubble and need to make a force [effort 40] check to extricate themselves.

DEFENCE TOWERS

The buildings on the corners of the settlement have not been demolished like their neighbours and instead sport weapons and fortifications to drive back would-be attackers.

The lower floors of these buildings are protected by a gauntlet of traps with ladders circumventing them to provide general access. In an emergency, those ladders can be pulled up into the building and enough rations are stockpiled on the upper floors to ensure each tower could independently withstand a siege for at least a day or two.

The edges of the rooftops are crenelated with sandbags, and most have two escape lines. One runs to the centre of the settlement, the other normally to a sewer access or other cover outside the wall.

These strong points seem impressive enough, but the park hasn't been attacked in years, and even then, it was only a few wandering berserkers.

Each defence tower in the park is likely to be slightly unique, but you can use this template as a general concept.

Traps

The traps in the lower floors of the towers are generally not explosive in nature as these could destabilise the building.

Most traps are not particularly well hidden. The Whisper's agents will avoid obvious threats, but not obvious triggers like a tripwire.

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Deadfall trap
Spot/listen [5] to detect

Range: Melee		AP: Ceramic	
Clipped [1]	Fractured [2]	Shattered [3–4]	Pulverised [5–6]

A deadfall trap is little more than a slab of heavy concrete propped up by a piece of wood. The wood is held in place only by a delicate balance of tension across a tripwire.

Characters that survive the damage are pinned under the concrete and must make a *force* [20] check to get loose.

Spike Pit
Spot/listen [15] to detect

Range: Melee		AP: Fibreweave	
Grazed [1]	Lacerated [2–4]	Crippled [5–6]	Cleaved

This pit of knives, cleavers, and other bladed objects is covered over by a thin mat. Stepping into it involves a short fall onto a lot of sharp. The victim suffers an automatic damage result as above to the foot, ankle, and calf of each leg (i.e., six results total).

Painful Fall
Spot/listen [15] to detect

On the upper level, a simple hole in the floor is covered over by a mat. The one floor drop inflicts a fracturing wound to a random hit location.

Note that this trap drops the victim directly onto the spike pit, triggering the effects of that trap as well.

Spear Gun Trap
Undetectable

Range: Short		AP: Fibreweave	
Nicked [1]	Punctured [2]	Pierced Deeply [3–4]	Run Through [5–6]

When the door adjacent is opened, the spear gun is triggered. While the trap is undetectable, there is a chance the victim won't be standing in the path of the spear.

The spear gun makes a +5 attack versus the target's *evade* defence.

Living Space

Most towers have a barracks and common area on the upper most floor where several full-time sentries live. This model is intended to ensure that, even in a surprise attack, there will be several militia with arms near to hand for defence.

While not optimised for fighting from, the outer walls of the living space have been reinforced with sandbagging.

In one of the towers, Mr. Nordstrom (or the player replacing him) has a full level to themselves between the living space and the roof.

Gun deck

While the roof provides an ideal position for sniping opponents, it is also exposed to attack from the air. For this reason, the towers include a gun deck below the living space. Most interior walls are removed, and the exterior walls have been reinforced. Two of the towers (at opposite cardinal points) have salvaged energy cannons on crude mountings.

Energy Cannon

Range: Extreme		AP: Adv. Composites	
Singed [1]	Burned [2]	Charred [3–4]	Immolated [5–6]

Blast [20]
Because of its poor mountings, this weapon must be reset with a complex action between every shot. On a natural 1 or 20 the weapon breaks its mounting after it shoots and cannot be fired again.

MR NORDSTROM "THE OLD MAN"

Background

The Old Man is an Eddings Park institution. Before there was a settlement, there was just an old man and the foundling child he rescued, turning an apartment building with good sightlines into a bunker.

Ever since Master Ren and the first survivors moved into the protective shadow of his tower, the Old Man has been the final word on settlement defence. If he doesn't like the look of someone, they aren't allowed in, if he thinks bringing something back to the park is an unacceptable risk, it's left behind.

A hermit before the Shatter, Mr. Nordstrom rarely socialises with the other settlers. Despite this ascetic disposition, he is kind to others and frequently comes out of his home to provide guidance on basic survival. Sometimes this is part of scheduled lessons, but often as not it is simply someone he spots from his tower who could use the help. Though no great surgeon, Nordstrom can also be a source of first aid for the players and other injured who come into the park. Note that he won't treat people in his home – he allows few visitors, no matter their justification.

Favoured Virtue: Compassionate

Favoured Vice: One for the-road

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

CAIRO

When there is a disagreement or an arbitration needed, that job falls to Master Ren. When someone commits an obvious crime and intends to flee or resist, the task falls to Cairo, who uses force, not words, to resolve the issue.

Background

A huge augmented man, and a police officer before the Whisper, Cairo was an obvious choice for law enforcement in Eddings Park. Cairo is not expected to be fair, like Ren, Cairo is simply expected to be Cairo, and it is best you do nothing that arises his ire.

With this foreboding and visible presence wandering the park, most criminal acts are prevented before they start. That is not to say Cairo has never had to take up arms against a guest, or even resident, of Eddings Park. Most notably he was responsible for discretely killing a paranoid disconnected who was trying to prove Ren was augmented.

This act has bothered Cairo deeply. He believed Ren should have killed the man, and they argued fiercely until finally Cairo felt he was forced to take action, not for Ren, but for the good of the settlement. It is an intervention he warned Ren he would only ever perform once.

Cairo believes that stability and relative prosperity have worn away the sense of desperation that once drove Eddings Park together, leaving the settlement ripe for a power play. Cairo attributes much of the settlement's success to Ren's good management, both of resources and of people, and he fears a self-interested replacement could easily destroy everything they've built. For that reason, authority and order are more important than law and justice. Cairo endeavours to be fair, but the survival of the settlement is more important than strict jurisprudence.

Of particular note is the fact that Cairo does not believe allowing augmented into Eddings Park was a good idea. This is an opinion that he tends to keep to himself, for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the fact he is himself augmented. Still, he sees the augmented as a huge security risk and not just because of the Whisper.

Favoured Virtue: Prudent

Favoured Vice: Den of cards

PLAYER HOMES

As Eddings Park is the players' home base, you should put some thought into their personal living circumstances, including who they might live with. Since it's likely they'll be returning to Eddings Park fairly early in the adventure, it's best that you seek some input from the players – it's their characters' home after all.

Besides swapping out the Old Man as mentioned earlier, consider that a Debutant or Whisper Orphan could be roommates with Li Wei, or the adoptee of Master Ren. Some should be public heroes of the settlement, like augmented War Veterans, network ghost Machine Hunters, and in general, anyone whose virtues suggest vanity or valour.

Outsiders like the ginbushi should be found in the so-called inn, a series of nice tents rented out to guests of the settlement. A few, like the system guardian Metallurgist, the network ghost Pariah and the ginbushi Yuki-Onna might be so standoffish that it is inappropriate for them to live in the town at all. They should visit with the other players and then disappear to their own nearby safe houses when it is time to rest.

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CAIRO – STATS

Movement: 5 Dash, 10 Long Dash.

Skills: Basic +5, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+6) in *athletics*, *force*, *endurance*, *defeat security*, *urbcraft*

DEFENCES

Cover 18 | Evade 14 | Base 5

IC 7

Armour: Rugged Clothing – Padding

Wounds Tolerance: 1

Tactics and Gear

In combat, Cairo tends to prefer autofire attacks for their psychological impact. Though he carries an RPG, he won't use it except on a heavily armoured opponent. He prefers to take criminals alive, but as soon as they present a danger to himself, or the settlement, he will go immediately to deadly force.

His augmentations include a pair of Hercules arms and runner's lungs. He also carries zip cuffs and enough rope to tie someone well beyond the point of wriggling away.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +5 | *Aim* +0 | *Recoil* +5 | *Melee* +3

WEAPON ATTACKS

Tonfa

Range: Melee | AP: Padding

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1–2]	[3–4]	[5–6]	

Assault Rifle

Range: Long | AP: Ceramic

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Shot through
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Burst, autofire, two-handed

RPG

Range: Medium | AP: Steel

Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated
[1]	[2–4]	[5]	[6]

Setup (simple), blast 15, scatters, two-handed, uses 4 munitions

CORMA – STATS

Movement: 6 Dash, 12 Long Dash.

Skills: Basic +5, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+6) in *endurance, civilised lore, engineering, intuition (places/things)*

DEFENCES

Cover 13 | Evade 8 | Base 3

IC Disconnected

Armour: Basic clothing.

Wounds Tolerance: 2 (large creature)

Large creatures treat all wounds dealt to them as one category lower, unless the weapon has the LAV or blast properties.

Tactics and Gear

Because of his advanced age, Corma is not as fast as he once was, but he remains ferociously capable and willing to fight. If necessary to protect the children in his charge, Corma will bodily wade into the line of fire.

Corma carries an oft repaired tablet PC scaled to his size. He also has a bag of flash drives containing materials he uses for his lessons.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +2 | *Aim* +4 | *Recoil* +2 | *Melee* +2

TALENTS

Incredible Strength

When making force checks, Corma uses a +10 modifier.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Unarmed

Range: Melee | AP: Ceramic

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2]	[3–4]	[5–6]

The sheer force of being hit by Corma knocks opponents down and staggers them (on the following round, they can only dash or take a simple action, and may not long dash)

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LI WEI – STATS

Movement: 5 Dash, 10 Long Dash.

Skills: Basic +3, Unskilled +3

Skilled (+8) in *react, computer use, defeat security, engineering*

DEFENCES

Cover 18	Evade 14	Base 5
	IC 10	

Armour: Rugged Clothing – Padding

Wounds Tolerance: 3

Tactics and Gear

In a fight, Li Wei will generally hang back and take *aimed* shots. She is not particularly disciplined, however; a friend in danger, or a particularly hated enemy can make her lose her cool, causing her to advance and make *snapshots*.

Besides her weapons, Li Wei is rarely seen without a toolkit and tablet PC. Feel free to give her some other tech items that are relevant to the circumstance – a drone, motion sensors, or a hand scanner.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +2 *Aim* +4 *Recoil* +2 *Melee* +2

WEAPON ATTACKS

Custom Thumper

Range: Short AP: Ceramic

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2]	[3–5]	[6]

This two-handed weapon is an overcharged crowd suppression weapon, restored and modified by Li Wei.

Anyone hit by this weapon is blasted back four squares in addition to the damage they suffer. On a natural 1 the weapon glitches and won't fire until repaired with an effort 40 engineering check.

MASTER REN – STATS

Movement: 4 Dash, 8 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +4, Unskilled +3

Skilled (+8) in *endurance, resist, civilised lore, intuition (people), spot/listen, urbcraft*

DEFENCES

Cover 20	Evade 14	Base 5
	IC 16	

Armour: Basic clothes, though he has access to combat armour if expecting a fight.

Wounds Tolerance: 3

Tactics and Gear

Master Ren is a great village manager, but he is not suited to combat, and he knows it. While he strives to avoid looking cowardly, he knows he is more valuable to Eddings Park alive than dead, so he willingly lets his devoted protectors take point on any conflict.

Master Ren has an **Eternity Memory Extension** augment.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +2 *Aim* +2 *Recoil* +1 *Melee* +1

TALENTS

That building looks sturdy!

Incidental

Select a structure within line of sight. Anyone who attacks versus the *cover* defence of an ally within suffers 1d6 disadvantage.

Get clear!

Off-turn Action

Once per round, when an enemy has made a successful weapon attack roll versus an ally, the ally may move up to their speed to a new location and the attack is changed to a miss.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Heavy Pistol

Range: Medium AP: Ceramic

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Two-handed

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MR NORDSTROM "THE OLD MAN" – STATS

Movement: 4 Dash, 8 Long Dash.

Skills: +4, Unskilled +0

Skilled (+5) in d*efeat security, medical, stealth, urbcraft, warcraft, wildscraft*

DEFENCES

Cover 20	Evade 12	Base 5
	IC Disconnected	

Armour: Combat Armour – Padding with ceramic torso and head protection

Wounds Tolerance: 2

Tactics and Gear

In combat, the Old Man focuses on taking *aimed* shots from a safe location (ideally his tower). If enemies get too close, he'll throw some grenades and retreat.

Nordstrom is never far from a bugout bag containing survival gear, climbing equipment, and raw materials for some basic traps.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +2	*Aim* +6	*Recoil* +4	*Melee* +2

WEAPON ATTACKS

Tantō

Range: Melee		AP: Fibreweave	
Grazed [1–2]	Lacerated [3–4]	Crippled [5–6]	Cleaved

Concealable, increase AP to Ceramic if wielded with two hands

Heavy Rifle

Range: Extreme		AP: Steel	
Clipped [1]	Fractured [2]	Shattered [3–4]	Pulverised [5–6]

Setup (simple), two-handed, LAV

Frag Grenades

Range: Short		AP: Ceramic	
Singed [1]	Burned [2–3]	Charred [4–5]	Immolated [6]

Thrown, blast 10, scatters, uses 2 munitions

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

THE WET-WARE

The Wet-ware is home to Magnolia, a surgeon, specialising in both trauma and cybernetics. She is a trustworthy go-to if the players need medical aid or cybernetics in between the arkets.

Tied off to the wharf is a two storey riverskater, perhaps thirty metres long. The air streams that keep it just off the surface of the water cast ripples that lap insistently at the water's edge. The name on the vessel says *Renaissance*, but everyone calls it the Wet-ware. For those who know its schedule, it houses Magnolia, reputedly the finest surgeon outside of the arcologies.

A pair of disconnected guard the gangplank while another aboard the ship keeps a pulse gun trained on you as you approach. The guards at the gangplank insist you leave your weapons in one of several foot lockers they have placed on the wharf edge.

With the key for your weapons locker in hand, you proceed aboard and meet the aug broker in her office just off the back deck. Many of you have met this woman before, for the rest, the first thing you notice is how long her limbs are, she goes straight past willowy and right into gangly at over six feet tall and whip thin. The grey making a steady advance on her temples speaks to an age her rigid stance does not.

Players who want to keep their weapons

Though you should read the introduction as though it's a given that players locker their gear, some of your players may interrupt and balk at surrendering their weapons. If this happens, encourage any who want to hold onto the weapons to remain on the wharf in case of trouble.

Alternatively, players can attempt to smuggle in concealable weapons, by rolling *spycraft* versus a +3 check from the guards to search for weapons. Anyone found trying to smuggle weapons on board will be banned from future entry (and you should warn the players of this should anyone wish to take the risk).

It's fairly important that you keep the Wet-ware a safe space, especially if it's the players' first visit. If you do want to host a fight here, we recommend having external aggressors. Your players shouldn't feel like giving up their weapons is an immediate setup for an ambush.

MAGNOLIA

You'd expect there to be at least one member in every party whose origin included some augmentation. Magnolia should greet this person directly and ask them about the repairs she last did on one of their augmentations.

Don't wear out your players with small talk, just enough to establish the prior connection before Magnolia asks the players what she can help with.

Magnolia maintains a decent catalogue of augmentations on hand, so allow the players to roll an *urbcraft* [10] check to find any cybernetic they might require. Magnolia also provides implant services and any general medical care at the prices listed in the *Play Guide*.

If the players fail on a roll, Magnolia can offer to seek out the augmentation they're looking for. She should require about two weeks to turn up any normal augmentation, and as GM, you should warn your players if the campaign is likely to make a revisit impossible. You don't have to reveal all your secrets, just be aware that the players will be disappointed if they spend four hours browsing cybernetics only to be whisked off-world before they can collect.

Lastly you should consider placing a single one of the artefact augmentations from this book up for sale. Often post-human augmentations are a good pick, since these rarities might be difficult to organically fit into your story.

An aging woman of Japanese ancestry, Magnolia is a quick learner. Though she has a practiced kindness when conversing, and a reasonable bedside manner, Magnolia easily slips into clinical coldness for decision making.

Years ago, Magnolia learned firsthand that the Whisper is willing to kill to prevent people from disconnecting. As a result, she now sees the augmented as victims and strives to help them both through cybernetic surgeries and conventional trauma care.

She won't turn away disconnected who are wounded, but she tends to encourage them to go to one of the many street surgeons that would turn away an augmented.

Favoured Virtue: Academic

Favoured Vice: A sip of brandy

William Kwan (Order #36187234)

Background

Once known as Doctor Shoko Nakamura, Magnolia was only a few years away from retirement when cybernetic technology first exploded onto the scene, so she chose not to adopt. This meant that, after the Shatter, she was one of the few unaffected surgeons, and she happily came out of retirement to serve the struggling hospitals.

When it became apparent that the Whisper was a wireless phenomenon, Nakamura made a business removing DNIs. She'd had little prior exposure to cybernetics and learnt a great deal in those early months, lessons for which many patients paid with their lives.

She had reached an acceptable level of proficiency around the time the Whisper decided to wipe out those clinics focusing on removing DNIs. She escaped with the help of a network ghost, but her lab was destroyed and her staff killed. She still had money, though – she had made more removing DNIs than she ever had as a trauma surgeon.

Aware of her negative reputation, Nakamura was pleased to discover the prevailing belief that she had died in the attack. She used her money to rebuild her operation aboard the *Renaissance*, adopting the name Magnolia. Once back on her feet, Magnolia dedicated her clinic to helping the augmented, and by the time rumours began linking Nakamura and Magnolia together, her new reputation had superseded the old one.

An obvious origin link is to make the network ghost who saved Magnolia one of the players. This is a connection both characters should keep discreet, but it would mean Magnolia owed a significant favour, perhaps even providing a subtle discount.

Such a connection is perhaps most appropriate for the Pariah origin, but any of the network ghosts would fit, as would the system guardian Metallurgist or, in a pinch, the Yuki-onna.

THE SURGERY

The workspaces of street surgeons can be pretty unsettling. Often a kitchen bench is the operating table, and the implements come out of the drawers nearby.

Fortunately, Magnolia is a lot more successful than many of her kind. Though small, the surgery gleams with sanitised surfaces. Life support and monitoring machines line the wall behind an operating table.

From the ceiling, a number of robot arms hang, able to hold patients perfectly steady for the more delicate micro-surgeries involved in augmentation. One of the arms has a precision surgical laser, its emerald lens somehow frightening even in its inert state.

Besides the main deck (where people can be thrown into the sea) the surgery is perhaps the most interesting location for a fight on the ship. The arms hanging from the ceiling can't be wirelessly controlled, but a *computer use* [10] check at the machines along the back wall should be enough to gain access.

At that point any one of the arms, or the laser, can be activated as a simple action. We encourage you to be flexible to any creative player use.

Robotic Grappling Arm (x4)

AP: Fibreweave — Range: Melee

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

On a successful attack, the target is grabbed at the rolled hit location. The grabbed limb is immobilised and the character cannot move off their current square.

A +10 force check is enough to escape a grappling arm, or it can be destroyed by any LAV weapon with an AP of at least padding

Surgical Laser

AP: Fibreweave — Range: Melee

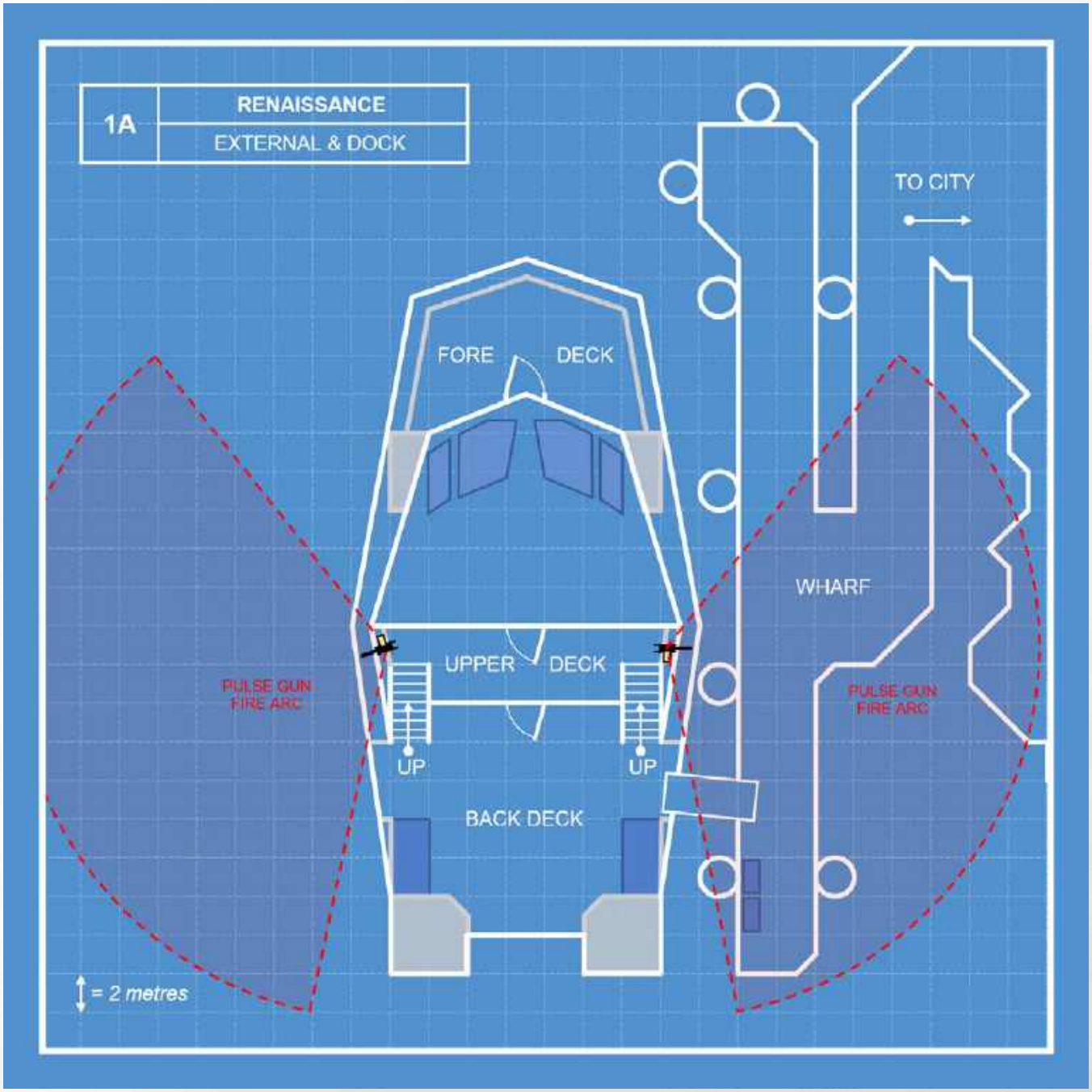
Grazed	Lacerated	Clipped	Cleaved
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

The laser makes slow precise movements and can only target characters that didn't move last round or are held by the grappling arm. Against grappled characters the laser may choose a hit location.

If the laser attacks the same character and hit location on successive rounds it may increase either the AP or the damage, by one category until it achieves a cleaved result.

As a beam weapon the surgical laser ignores magnetic screens.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)



THE VAULT

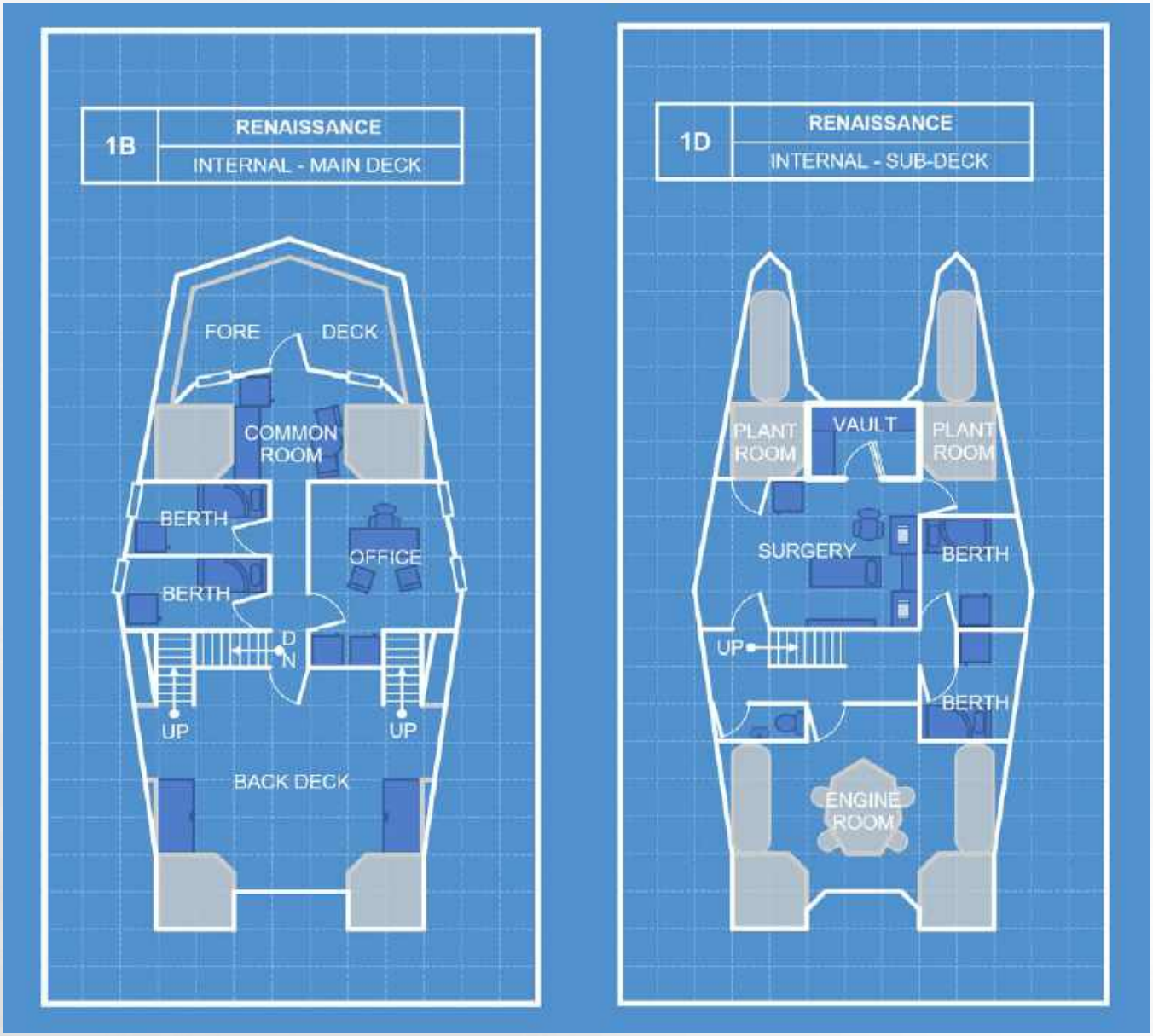
Deep in the vessel is a vault door. Sealed tight, you can't venture its thickness, but the setup implies it will outlast the boat around it by a good eon or two. A panel to the side insists on a code, and a retinal scanner above it suggests the code might not be enough. A key aperture below *that* graduates the system from 'layered' to 'unnecessarily elaborate'.

The vault is the store for all augmentations that Magnolia keeps on hand. If the players break-in seeking specific augmentations, you should get them to make the normal *urbcraft* [10] check to see if Magnolia had it in stock.

If the players simply wish to steal all the augmentations for future sale, the black-market sale value would be ¥8,400,000 (twenty-five percent of their 'new' value of ¥33 million). This comes in the form of some twenty to thirty augmentations, many of which are quite heavy, so extracting the salvage without first securing the boat would be difficult.

Being known for having robbed or killed Magnolia would see the players barred from most locations.

William Kwan (Quiz - 36187234)



THE WHEELHOUSE

The *Renaissance* is controlled from a single small room on the topmost deck. Here large windows provide a commanding view, and a set of archaic controls require a very 'hands on' mode of operation.

With its more advanced systems removed, the riverskater is not easily controlled. A character outside of Magnolia's trained crew would suffer 1d6 disadvantage on all checks as they struggled with the multitasking necessary. Having a co-pilot would remove this penalty.

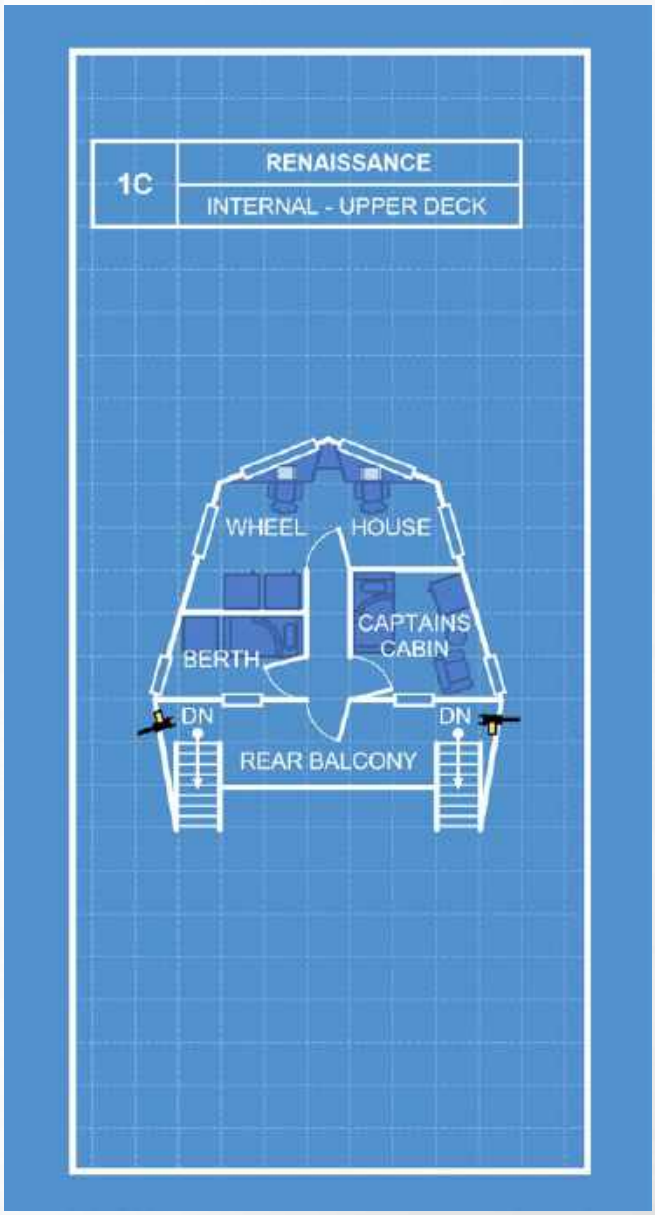
The control systems for the vessel require a 'captain's key' to operate, but since the wheelhouse is always occupied, the key is always in the control deck. Should it be lost or stolen, Magnolia keeps a spare in her room.

POST-OPERATION RECOVERY

Cybernetic implantation is significant surgery and can have a recovery time of days, or even weeks. Generally, Magnolia does not provide any recovery monitoring, and patients should travel with the means to get back to safety.

For a significant fee, however (¥35,000 per night), she does have a couple of spare rooms on the *Renaissance* that can act as recovery accommodation. For security reasons, such patients are the only ones allowed on the *Renaissance* overnight.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)



THE BERTHS

The quarters on the *Renaissance* are not terribly exciting. Most of the crew share rooms with simple bunkbeds, while Magnolia has her own dedicated room. A combined common room and galley provides food.

RENAISSANCE – STATS

Movement Type: Hover (12" altitude max)
Speed Rating: 2
Risk Margin: N/A
Mechanical Tolerance: 2
Primary Armour: Ceramic (equivalent: actual materials are thin metal and plastics)
Damage Threshold: Blast
Annihilation Threshold: Large Blast
Crew positions: Driver, Engineer, Berths for six others
Access points: Gangplanks onto the aft decks
Weakness – Windows
Difficulty / skill: Apparent
Vulnerable to: all weapons with an AP of at least padding.
Impact: The vehicle's driver is clearly visible and may be targeted separately to the vehicle. When attacking this weakness, roll a normal attack versus the driver instead of the vehicle.

Description:
A riverskater is a kind of hovercraft. Using Newtonian lattices to lower its weight, it eschews the traditional inflated skirts in favour of a number of air streams angled out to provide a surprisingly stable platform. Though the riverskater's reduced mass makes them unsuitable for inclement weather, they have the advantage of being able to move onto dry land and park to sit out bad storms. Note that a riverskater is not a LEVV, it cannot elevate more than about 12" from the ground, making it unsuited for any kind of off-road travel.

The *Renaissance* was once a private leisure craft, left abandoned in a boathouse after its owners died in the Shatter. Magnolia located the vessel and paid no small amount to have arcology technicians install new control systems that were not vulnerable to wireless attacks. The loss of radar and isolated comm gear means they struggle to detect other river vessels, but since the Shatter, they rarely encounter another craft, and the Whisper is definitely the greater risk.

Now the vessel serves as Magnolia's home, providing easy escape from collectors, and anyone else who might get excited at the thought of raiding a boat full of clean cybernetics. Theoretically, such a vessel would be an easy target for Peacemakers, but Magnolia learned long ago that the Whisper is not interested in targeting her directly.

WEAPONS

Ram			
Range: Melee		AP: Ceramic	
Clipped [1]	Fractured [2]	Shattered [3–4]	Pulverised [5–6]
Considered to have the blast property for vehicle damage			

Pulse Guns (x2)			
Range: Medium		AP: Steel	
Clipped [1]	Fractured [2–3]	Shattered [4–5]	Pulverised [6]
Autofire only, LAV, first 2 autofire attacks always trigger additional autofire attacks.			

William Kwan (Quiz - 36187234)

MAGNOLIA – STATS

Movement: 4 Dash, 8 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +1, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+7) in *civilised lore, disguise, medical*

DEFENCES

Cover 17 | Evade 12 | Base 5

IC Disconnected

Armour: Clothing – Sterile apron and surgery garb

Wounds Tolerance: 2

Tactics and Gear

Magnolia's combat skills are extremely limited, and her preference is to make herself too valuable to be worth attacking. If combat does happen, her priority is escaping with her riverskater. She will happily hide behind her bodyguards and will even abandon them if necessary. Though aware that reputation is important, Magnolia also knows she has reinvented her identity once before and could do it again.

Despite her medical profession, Magnolia is not the sort to carry a medical kit with her, she believes herself a hospital surgeon, not a paramedic. At most she'll carry a few personal items.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +0 | *Aim* +3 | *Recoil* +0 | *Melee* +0

TALENTS

Neural Stimulant

Incidental, once per encounter

Magnolia injects an adjacent ally with a chemical that streamlines the brain's ability to communicate with cybernetics. Until the end of the encounter, that character may add 1d6 advantage to any checks that use any augment (such as force checks if you have a Hercules augment).

Using the drug more than once causes the victim to lose a wound point permanently due to mental trauma. This latter reason is why Magnolia does not sell this drug, keeping it for use in an emergency.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Light Pistol

Range: Short | AP: Fibreweave

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Shot through
[1]	[2–4]	[5]	[6]

Concealable

MAGNOLIA'S CREW – STATS

Movement: 4 Dash, 8 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +3, Unskilled +3

Skilled (+5) in *drive, urbcraft*

DEFENCES

Cover 18 | Evade 12 | Base 5

IC Disconnected

Armour: Rugged clothing & fibreweave vests – Padding with fibreweave torso

Wounds Tolerance: 0

Tactics and Gear

Magnolia's ship has five crew who double as bodyguards. Aware that they could be quickly overwhelmed by any committed attack force, their priority is to disengage. Besides the pulse guns mounted on the boat, the crew keep submachine guns close to hand and have at least one RPG for hardened targets.

At least one crew member is on watch in the wheelhouse at all times, and they will pull away from moorings as soon as any guards on the wharf are back aboard. Once under power, the crew focus on clearing any threats that managed to get onto the ship. Since Magnolia is their meal ticket, her safety is the first priority, even it ultimately means abandoning their vessel. The crew are mercenaries; however, they're more than willing to kill for Magnolia, but they'd rather not die for her.

During the night, the ship pulls away from the river's edge so that most crew can sleep. During the small hours, the one man watch in the wheel house is deemed sufficient. For surgeries, one or two members of Magnolia's crew are often called on to act as nurses.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +4 | *Aim* +2 | *Recoil* +5 | *Melee* +2

WEAPON ATTACKS

Submachine gun

Range: Medium | AP: Ceramic

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Shot through
[1]	[2–4]	[5]	[6]

Two-handed, burst, autofire, +1d6 to snap instead of aim

RPG

Range: Medium | AP: Steel

Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated
[1]	[2–4]	[5]	[6]

Setup (simple), blast 15, scatters, two-handed, uses 4 munitions

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

THE PULSE

APPROACH

You quickly overcome the aging lock on the maintenance access and descend a few flights of stairs to the motor-tunnels beneath. Here the ceiling gives way to sky every hundred metres or so to provide sunlight and air to the motor-tunnels.

Trucks and cars whip by periodically, repeating some endless trip demanded by the city's SmartDrive network as their passengers, either deceased or lost, stare vacantly through the windshields.

A talented graffiti artist has made a massive decal depicting the city before and after the Shatter. Almost as an afterthought, an arrow and the words 'Pulse' have been painted next to it. The arrow points through to one of the building's underground garages.

Inside there's a party of six disconnected on a variety of salvaged chairs playing dice. A pair of dogs sit around their feet, but their heads are perked up an looking in your direction.

As you approach, the disconnected collect various assault rifles and shotguns, not with urgency but with practiced caution. Just to their right is a bank of lockers, behind them is a door with the word 'Pulse' stencilled on it.

"If you're auged, your weapons go in the lockers," one of them says, "bushi can keep their swords, but that's it."

Concealing Weapons

Players can attempt to smuggle in concealable weapons, by rolling *spycraft* versus a +3 check from the guards to search for weapons. If the guards find something, that character will have to stay outside and play dice while their buddies go in.

The players can try and convince the guards to let their disconnected (if they have one) hold their guns. Of course, the players can also give their weapons to the disconnected in advance, but if a disconnected shows up with twenty guns, the guards will need to be convinced anyway (they're not morons).

INSIDE THE PULSE

The Pulse seems to have been setup in what was once a receiving room. The palettes and boxes are all gone, but a crane on rails still sits in the high ceiling and two of the palette shelves have been put together to form a sort of mezzanine seating.

The area is lit technicolour by a dazzling variety of retro-tech neon tubes and cable-lights that hang from the ceiling and adorn the walls. A bar runs most of the length of one wall with three bartenders reinforced by several travelling servers. On the wall above the bar the letters 'P.U.L.S.E' hang from UTP cables, and you note, they are hanging from a large EMP mine. Suddenly the name makes sense.

All the tables and chairs look like they were stolen from break halls and conference rooms. There are stools at the bar, standing tables, and booths with privacy barriers.

It's a fairly busy night, augmented mercenaries, scavengers, and prostitutes are linked up to disconnected survivors and corporates by a handful of highly mobile fixers. A DJ keeps the music loud enough to prevent any casual eavesdropping between the patrons, but not so deafening that it disrupts business. Drinks flow freely to those celebrating business deals, those outcast from the settlements, and those slumming it from the arcologies.

Food and drink

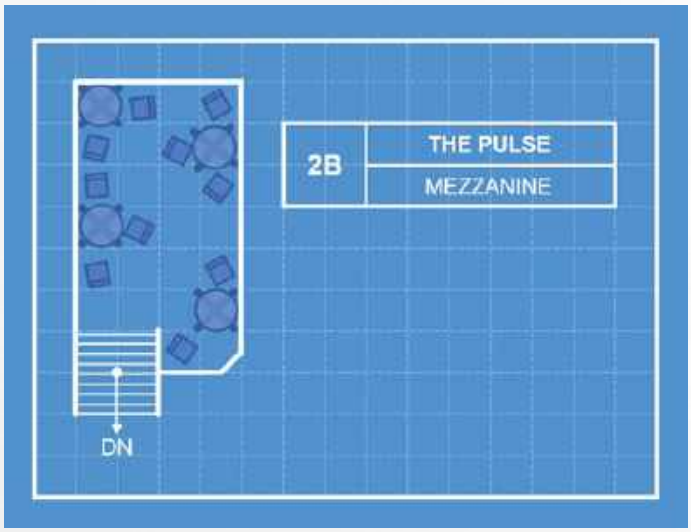
The bar serves plenty of drinks, with a variety of alcoholic kick, as well as snack food. Since players are not normally expected to pay for food and drink, this should not be necessary here either unless the players particularly wish to make a statement – "I'm buying a round for the whole house".

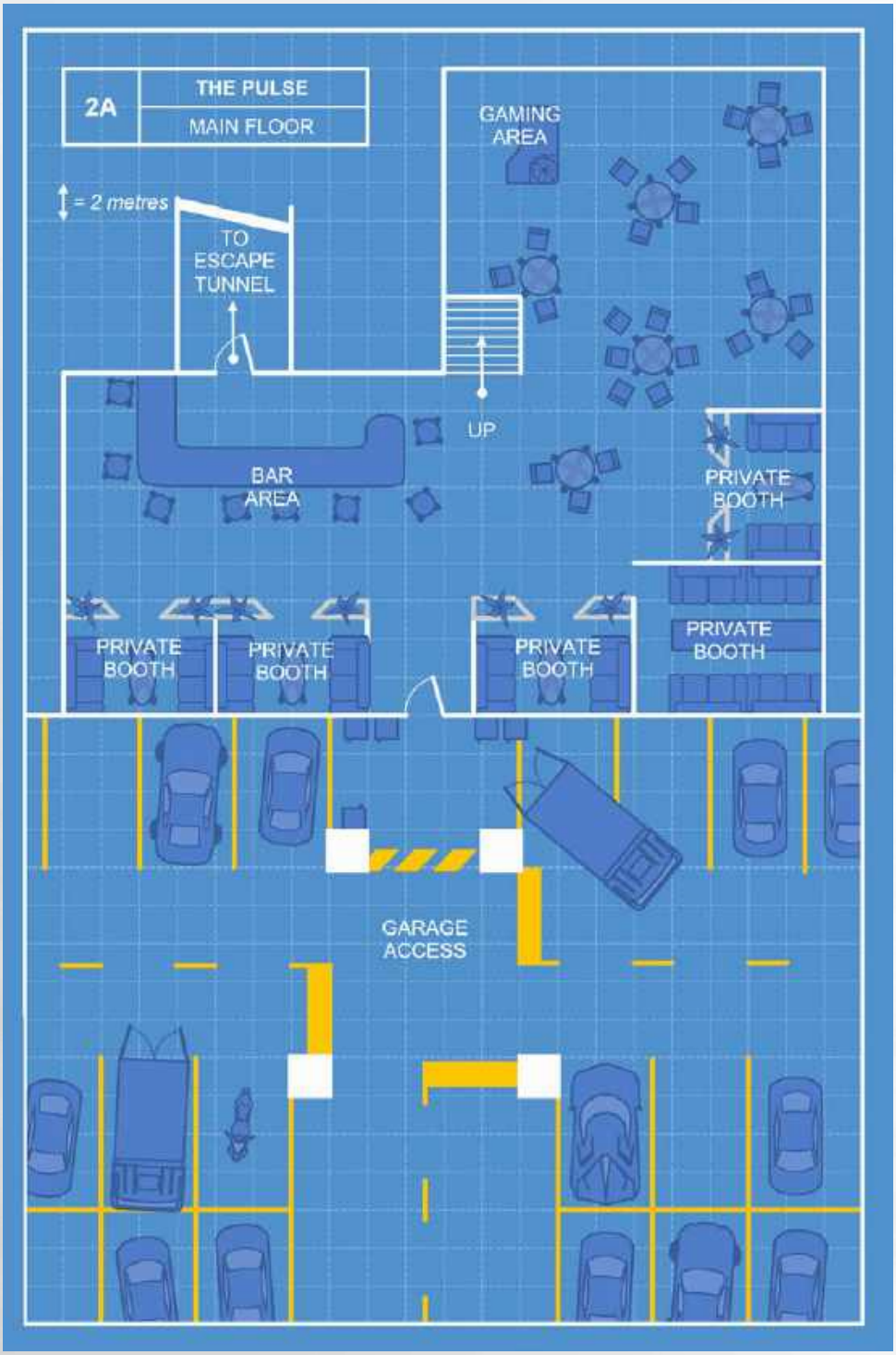
The Music

The live DJ is actually not uncommon for wired bars. Most 'stock' music was cloud-stored and either lost or of questionable trustworthiness. For this reason, live performers are the new norm. Scarcity means even a successful 'band' probably can't charge enough to feed all its members so most musicians are solo acts, many of them only part time.

DJs are hired, not so much for their mixing ability, as for their carefully guarded stock of 'safe' music. Many DJs wiredive themselves, others trade, beg and even kill to build their collections from the labours of others.

William Kwan (Order: 36187234)





William Kwan (Order #36487234)

Quest Givers

The main purpose of wired bars is to bring together those who need work and those who need work done. We recommend you select a number of appropriate quest givers from p. 131 or place some of your own.

Obviously, if your players have come here to meet someone in particular, you needn't decide who else might be present unless it becomes relevant.

Players as Quest Givers

Don't forget that the players can also act as quest givers. If they need some mercenary muscle or to find a specialist this is a great place.

Pricing such things can be difficult. The best approach is to consider what you would reward the players for a task of similar challenge.

Who owns the Pulse

Although most people believe the Pulse has a single owner, an *urbcraft* or *spycraft* [20] check will reveal the truth. The fixers who operate out of the Pulse are also its financiers and, therefore, its owners. Although Ortellus is the largest investor, she still owns less than fifty percent which means decisions are made by committee.

THE BLACK MARKET

Wired bars are almost always havens for the black market, and the Pulse is no exception. The players may roll for any non-artefact item, but there are risks. An abridged version of the black-market rules from p.140 of the *Play Guide* can be found below.

Finding an item or a buyer

There are lots of people at the Pulse looking to sell and/or buy items without making a scene. Most regular items should be *spycraft* [15] to find, while things that seem high-tech or extremely valuable should be [20]. Finding a trader for an untouchable item (see p.141 of the *Play Guide*) should be [25] or higher.

Whether they succeed or fail, the players generally cannot make multiple attempts for the same items. It's a small place and not optimised for trading.

Black-Market Prices

Items purchased from the black market come at half the normal purchase price. Items sold to the black market are sold at twenty-five percent of their purchase price.

Buyer Beware

When a player purchases an item from the black market, you should make a +5 roll versus their *spycraft* check. This roll is made in secret and indicates the chance there will be some issue with the item purchased.

At best, the item will be an elaborate fake and will break as soon as the players attempt to use it in field conditions. At worst, items may be tainted by the Whisper, a particularly perilous prospect if the item was an augmentation.

Note that the *spycraft* checks the player makes includes attempts to test and investigate items to identify fakes. Beyond the outcome of the roll, no attempt to test or reverse engineer the item will reveal its true nature until it's used against a live enemy (i.e., no meta-gaming).

At your discretion, you may have the item work several times before failing at the most inopportune moment.

ORTELLUS – THE FIXER

There are several fixers present in the Pulse on any good night, but the most visible is always Ortellus. Not only is she Averyn, with the height and commanding presence their race affords, but her mane has been dyed a startling pastel pink.

As an Averyn, Ortellus is not easily moved. Averyn cannot become outraged on behalf of others; to be offended by something, an Averyn needs to have a personal stake in the matter. Even then, most Averyn would find the average human overly emotional and fundamentally compromised when making decisions.

Though she is a very successful fixer, Ortellus is not a fixer for personal benefit. She knows the Whisper must be stopped, and she knows organised resistance is crushed. By acting as a fixer, she can make sure she learns everything she can about this menace, and when an employer has a plausible strategy for opposing it, Ortellus takes special interest. Such employers will tend to find the best mercenaries in the city end up working for them, even if they can't afford it. Ortellus has saved up significant sums for such work and is not above subsidising contracts via an alias of 'an unnamed third party'.

Favoured Virtue: Cultured

Favoured Vice: (Wo)maniser

William Kwan (Quo - 36187234)

Background

Ortellus is younger than she looks (as the Averyn reckon it), and before the Shatter, she was the equivalent of a rich jobless playgirl. Such individuals are not long humoured in Averyn society, and this led to Ortellus touring the outer Empire where her people didn't run things.

Her lack of formal position or ambition probably kept her off the Whisper's radar during the Shatter. Despite her own survival, losing everything, and then realising survivors were looking to her for a solution, was a wakeup call for Ortellus.

Charismatic and versed in many languages, Ortellus was good with people but bad with leadership. She had little worldly experience, and being responsible for others would always repulse her. Rather than trying to lead, Ortellus networked, sending people to others more equipped to provide them with what they needed.

In this way, Ortellus almost accidentally became a fixer, perhaps even one of the first of the post-Shatter world.

Services: Hiring Agents

If the players are looking to be hired, Ortellus will hook them up with an employer at no charge. On the other hand, getting Ortellus to find a mercenary or specialist for you generally costs five percent of the planned pay packet. This is common for fixers, the more valuable the job, the more effort the fixer will go to finding the perfect specialist, and therefore, the more compensation they require.

Employers and employees are warned that any information provided to the fixer is subject to future sale. Confidentiality can be purchased by either doubling the fee or by providing some information of equivalent value.

Services: Artefact Trading

Artefacts are difficult to sell and even more difficult to purchase. If dealing in unique items, either could be a quest unto itself.

The fixers are a logical starting point for any such quest, able to put players in touch with an obscure mercenary who might just be willing to buy the rare weapon they have, or a disgruntled corporate agent who might be willing to slip an experimental cybernetic out the back door of the arcology.

Services: Information

All fixers double, to some extent, as information brokers. It is simple nature that a significant amount of information flows through their hands. If you need to find a person, place, or thing, the fixers are a great starting point.

As a rule, fixers (and all information brokers) determine a fair price for the information and then double it. In order to get back to the original 'reasonable' price, a customer must offer up some information that is new to the fixer. Sometimes the fixers will ask for a particular piece of confidential information that they expect the customer to know.

In this way, the fixers ensure they rarely give out information without also collecting something new.

IF THE BOMB GOES OFF

If it seems like multiple augmented are compromised, or that other agents of the Whisper are in danger of breaching the Pulse, one of the bartenders will yank on one of the UTP cables. This immediately detonates the EMP mine, causing two effects.

Firstly, the bartender loses their forearm in the electric discharge. A player can detect this risk with an *engineering* or *warcraft* [15] check.

Secondly, all unshielded electronic devices, smart weapons, cybernetics, exoskeletons, and vehicles are shut down until repaired by an *engineering* [effort 20] check. All characters with DNIs must make an *endurance* [15] check or be stunned by the feedback and unable to move or act on their next turn. This effect reaches from the bomb all the way to the front of the garage entrance.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

ORTELLUS – STATS

Movement: 4 Dash, 8 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +1, Unskilled +4

Skilled (+7) in *resist, civilised lore, disguise, intuition (people), spycraft*

DEFENCES

Cover 22 | Evade 15 | Base 5

IC Disconnected

Armour: Fine durable clothing over a fibreweave vest.

Wounds Tolerance: 1

Tactics and Gear

Ortellus is solid in a fight, but this is more due to the perks of her species than any particular affinity. At her heart, she'll always be a lover not a fighter and is aware that simply being an Averyn makes her a target. When confronted by combat, she won't immediately flee, but she'll move to a position where plenty of others are between her and danger and where she has a clear line of retreat.

Though she has considerable personal investment in the Pulse, she knows such establishments have a limited lifespan. In truth, she is surprised Pulse has lasted this long. If she decides the situation is unsalvageable, she'll direct others to the escape routes.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +7 | *Aim* +8 | *Recoil* +0 | *Melee* +5

TALENTS

Go for the weak point!

Incidental, once per round

Once per round Ortellus can provide critical guidance, allowing an ally to reroll a hit location.

Averyn will to live

Incidental

Ortellus remains fully active even while making death saves. She will literally fight until she dies. Additional wounds force an additional death save. Averyn have a fixed +20 versus the death [30] save.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Auto Pistol

Range: Medium | AP: Fibreweave

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Shot through
[1]	[2–4]	[5]	[6]

Burst fire

PULSE GUARDS – STATS

Movement: 4 Dash, 8 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +3, Unskilled +0

Skilled (+3) in *engineering, urbcraft*

DEFENCES

Cover 18 | Evade 13 | Base 5

IC Disconnected

Armour: Fibreweave Vest

Wounds Tolerance: Minion

Tactics and Gear

The Pulse guards are disconnected mercenaries. Their role is predominantly to act as bouncers, ensuring the Pulse's weapons policy is followed.

Should the bar come under serious attack, their direction is to buy as much time for those within as they can without unduly risking their lives. Ultimately the Pulse is not meant to be defended, it is meant to be abandoned.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +5 | *Aim* +4 | *Recoil* +3 | *Melee* +4

WEAPON ATTACKS

Shotgun

Range: Short | AP: Fibreweave

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1-2]	[3–5]	[6]	

Two-handed
When firing the shotgun roll one for damage, but three times for hit location at short range, or five times at point blank.

Assault Rifle

Range: Long | AP: Ceramic

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Shot through
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Two-handed, burst, autofire

Frag Grenades

Range: Short | AP: Ceramic

Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Thrown, blast 10, scatters, uses 2 munitions

William Kwan (Order: 36187234)

OTHER PATRONS - STATS

Movement: 4 Dash, 8 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +3, Unskilled +0

Skilled (+5) in: roll a *luck* [10] check to see if any given patron has necessary skill

DEFENCES

Cover 15	Evade 10	Base 5
	IC 8 or Disconnected	

Armour: Rugged Clothing – Padding

Wounds Tolerance: Minion

Tactics and Gear

The patrons of the Pulse are a tremendously varied lot. Some are delicate mid-level arcology workers with no appetite for violence. Others are hard-bitten augmented mercenaries reduced to only their fists by the weapons policy.

Given the varied crowd, there will be no consistent strategy or organised response to a threat. Some will try to fight their way out, while some will try to make a stand, and still others will probably attack entirely the wrong people in the confusion. Some will be so inexperienced with combat they may just cower behind their tables.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +2	*Aim* +0	*Recoil* +2	*Melee* +2

WEAPON ATTACKS

Auto Pistol			
Range: Medium		AP: Fibreweave	
Nicked [1]	Punctured [2–4]	Pierced Deeply [5]	Shot through [6]
Burst fire			

Shotgun			
Range: Short		AP: Fibreweave	
Clipped [1-2]	Fractured [3–5]	Shattered [6]	Pulverised
Two-handed When firing the shotgun roll once for damage, but three times for hit location at short range, or five times at point blank.			

Augmented Punch			
Range: Melee		AP: Fibreweave	
Clipped [1]	Fractured [2–3]	Shattered [4–5]	Pulverised [6]

There are too many possible patrons to realistically provide stats for all in attendance. Should a scuffle break out in the Pulse, we recommend you have most of the patrons stay out of it (most would figure there's no point getting banned over someone else's concerns).

If there is a common threat, use the previous as a 'generic patron' stat block. If a character is present whom you deem important enough to need a specific block, have a look at the augmented mercenaries and corporate representatives in Part VI.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

THE 21st ARATAYO ARKET

This season's arket has been setup on a promenade in the city's first ring. The lower floors of several buildings have been secured to act as accommodation and tap rooms while the broad pedestrian avenue has been tiled over with stall after stall of the market proper. Like the previous two years, it covers more ground than most settlements.

House guards from several ginbushi clans patrol the perimeter, and ginbushi guard the market itself. Overhead you can see the telltale glimmer of a satblanket and occasionally you spot a sniper team perched on a rooftop.

The most noteworthy places for you to visit are:

• The main market – here you can find no shortage of weapons, armour, and gear.

• The cybernetics market – the arket is one of the few places you can easily and reliably find cybernetics.

• A wired bar called .TMP (normally pronounced 'Dot Temp') where a fixer you've worked for named Kline may have work for you.

Besides the above, we recommend you tie your story into the arket in some way. The players shouldn't be here just to shop – perhaps they have to find, even abduct, someone from beneath the watchful eyes of security. Perhaps they're looking for information or have information they need someone to help them understand. Maybe one of the other teams from Eddings Park failed in a mission for a dangerous fixer, and the players have been selected to report that failure and, hopefully, muscle their way out of the consequences.

If any of these are the case, you should give the players some idea of where to start their search.

The Itero Heiress

If you have a Stillwater ginbushi in your party, make sure to address that here. The Itero group are major sponsors of the arkets, and it is one of the few times a large force of their personnel and ginbushi can be found outside of their arcology.

It may be necessary to disguise both the heiress and her ginbushi protector. This is also an excellent opportunity to call into question the ginbushi's loyalty – if confronted by a direct order to return their charge to the arcology, will they comply?

Equally this is a good opportunity to have the heiress show their affection for their guardian (and perhaps the entire party) by using their significant funds to purchase something the party needs. Such a gift is especially effective if the item is too expensive for the party to afford at all.

Attendance

The attendance at the arkets varies quite a bit from season to season. Some seasons travel is a lot more dangerous than others; some seasons the arcologies simply aren't interested in putting on a major affair.

Even small arkets are still pivotal events. The arket represents the one safe inter-settlement gathering space. Not only does this provide the opportunity to exchange ideas, news, and gossip, it also provides an escape from the same four walls at home.

Attendance at the twenty-first Aratayo Arket breaks down as follows:

- Approximately ten thousand people per day, with most people staying at least two days.
- Over a hundred stalls, peaking at 175 stalls on the second day. About twenty stalls belong to the arcologies. A further thirty stalls are 'specialists' such as weapons merchants, the remainder are generalists.
- Several dozen food vendors, some travelling, some fixed, providing for visitors.
- half a dozen drinking establishments and inns, some outdoor, some indoor; at least three have no-aug policies.

SECURITY

While the arket is nominally 'friendly territory', your players may still find violence. Since you want your players to be willing to split up in the more civilised areas (so the whole party isn't being towed around so someone can shop), it's important that you handle such violence carefully. Critically, any combat should either be started by the players themselves, well telegraphed so the party can regroup, or clearly intended for one player (such as a duel with a villain from their personal origin).

With that in mind, the below details should provide some inspiration for any combat that may occur.

Open Carry

There are no rules restricting the carrying of weaponry at the arket. Given most people had to travel through some fairly unsafe areas just to get there, it's fair to say that almost everyone in attendance is armed.

William Kwan (Order #36187234)

While the carrying of weapons is not frowned on, the use of them certainly is. Loud exchanges of gunfire attract exactly the sort of trouble the ginbushi don't want, so they will tend to over-respond to such instances. When they tell you to stop shooting and drop your gun, immediate compliance is often the only way to avoid a summary execution by a disgruntled samurai.

House Guards Patrols

The house guards are the first line of defence; their patrols are intended to encounter and identify threats well outside the arket proper. If they can deal with the threat quickly and quietly, they will, otherwise the alert force will be dispatched.

These outer patrols are ambivalent to survivors, scavengers, and mercenaries.

The twenty-first arket has four 'major' patrols of ten-man units, interspaced by another twenty, two-man patrols.

Ginbushi

The ginbushi protect the main entrances to the arket, detaining anyone who attempts to enter illegally. They also patrol within the arket, maintaining a visible presence to discourage misbehaviour.

The zaibatsu are well aware that any significant violence at the arket, even if it ends favourably, will damage the illusion of arket safety and corporate power. For this reason, ginbushi are encouraged to defuse, rather than escalate situations. If a situation seems in danger of getting out of control, the directive is to respond with overwhelming force.

The ginbushi patrol in pairs, one aspirant and one true samurai. At peak there are ten such patrols.

Non-entrance Perimeter

Most arkets are set in stadiums, or other facilities with limited access points. That the twenty-first is set on a promenade is a demonstration of power by the arcologies.

To prevent this from turning into a disaster, the ginbushi clans spent significant time identifying and closing off access points to the arket. Doors onto back alleys were welded shut, windows were rigged with shatter alarms and underground tunnels were filled with thermoplastic (they don't want to permanently collapse tunnels that might contain critical pipes and cabling).

Many of these passive defences could be overcome undetected by an experienced infiltration team. This is considered an acceptable risk, the arket is not trying to keep out specialists, it's trying to keep out wandering collectors and other menaces.

During the arket, zaibatsu LEVVs (and sometimes mortars) deploy noise markers into unoccupied parts of the city to draw off any concentrations of the Whisper's forces.

Sniper Teams

The five best vantage points over the arket are manned by sniper teams. These house guardsmen are directed to monitor rooftops and windows for anyone attempting an assassination during the arket. Since no one has yet attempted this, the sniper teams tend to be inattentive and will often watch the bustle of the arket instead of trawling their optics over empty windows and rooftops.

The teams are in radio contact with patrolling ginbushi. In an emergency, they'll be called on to fire into the arket. Unlike most other security teams, the snipers pack-up late at night and don't return to their locations until early the next morning.

The Alert Force

Three shifts of personnel maintain an alert force twenty-four hours a day for the duration of the arket. The force consists of twenty true samurai ginbushi led by a master.

Should a group of berserkers be heading for the arket, this force is directed to eliminate them without the use of loud firearms. If trouble breaks out on the arket floor, the alert force can be deployed internally.

Reserves

Because of the shifts required to ensure around the clock protection of the arket, the defenders can call up 'off shift' personnel as reserves. Because an arket has never been seriously attacked, the reserve personnel tend to have a relaxed posture, and their response time is quite poor. The first units would be assembled and equipped within minutes, but it could be hours before the last stragglers are ready.

In total, the reserves number twenty ginbushi true samurai, twenty aspirants, and forty house guard.

Private Protection

Despite the presence of the ginbushi, most drinking establishments and some of the merchants hire their own protection. Generally, these individuals aren't specialists so much as large visibly-augmented bruisers.

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NO-AUG AREAS

Traditionally the arkets did not allow augmented into most areas, maintaining a separate 'open' market for anyone with a wireless connection. A combination of comparatively few security issues, and old fashion greed, has seen the open section of the arket grow season after season until no-aug areas are actually the exception.

As a GM, this lets you have your cake and eat it too. In a general sense, your heroes will be free to travel the market unimpeded. Should they be looking for someone or something as a part of a quest, you can easily introduce the plausible complication of having their enemy use one of the no-aug bars as a hiding place.

THE MARKET AREAS

The main draw of the arket are the rows and rows of stalls hawking every kind of good. Corporate booths with glass display cases and fabricator-built merchandise have pride of place on the main thoroughfares. Take a side route, and you'll find mercenaries, scavengers, and peddlers with salvaged equipment of every stripe.

Purchasing from the Arkets

Besides cybernetics, any item in the *Play Guide* is available from this area of the arket with a *civilised lore* [15] check.

The players can make up to three attempts to find any given item; however, each attempt (successful or not) takes a third of the day.

Selling to the Arkets

Items from the *Play Guide* that aren't 'untouchable' (see p,139 of the *Play Guide*) can be sold using an identical check to that used for purchasing. Items are sold at 50% their value.

Finding a buyer for an artefact item is substantially harder. The wealth to purchase high-tech gear, combined with the need for it, do not often overlap in the post-Shatter world. Get the player to roll a *civilised lore* check as normal and compare to the below:

RESULT	SALE VALUE
25	50%
20	25%
15	10%
< 15	Lowest of ¥100,000 or 10% the value of the item

Players may make repeat rolls to improve their chances, but it's at your discretion whether the offers uncovered from earlier rolls are still available.

For extremely valuable items, consider making a quick judgement call on who ended up with the item. If you know the players are going to be attacked by a bounty hunter later, have that hunter buy a beam rifle the players are offloading. Later when he uses it on them, the players will both love and hate the coincidence.

THE CYBERNETICS MARKET

Browsing cybernetics in a market environment is always strange. Some specialist stalls are creepy because there's nothing about a table full of dismembered metal hands that *isn't* creepy. If you want to avoid the specialists, you have to trawl the market for other sellers who might have picked up a piece or two, and there are few sights as unsettling as seeing a man waving at you with a plastiflesh leg of uncertain origin.

Purchasing Cybernetics

The process for buying cybernetics follows exactly the same rules as purchasing other items (see 'Purchasing from Arkets' above).

For some extra interest, keep an eye on the players' magnitude of success. If they beat the *civilised lore* check by 5 or more, they find a skilled doctor to implant their cybernetics, any less and they get the Welding Witch. See below for the ramifications.

Cybernetic Implantation: Skilled Doctor

Your search for a surgeon willing and able to implant your newly purchased cybernetic takes you to Doctor Joelson Finch. An arcology cyberneticist, he's not the cheapest at the arket, but he is extremely professional, with a full featured surgery that includes implements you haven't seen since before the Shatter.

There are no special complications or effects to getting implants from this surgeon.

Cybernetic Implantation: The Welding Witch

The biggest problem with purchasing your new augmentation turns out to be finding someone willing to do the delicate implantation surgery. While there are plenty of doctors at the arket, all of the reputable ones have been booked up.

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What you get instead is the 'Welding Witch' – a self-professed crone who reattaches almost as many limbs as she removes. Her medical facility isn't so much a facility as it is a tent with sharp implements in it. She calls your attention to a disclaimer warning that any complications arising post-surgery are not her responsibility.

Some players may want to back out after this, and that's okay. Reiterate that the witch is the only available surgeon for the rest of the arket, but don't otherwise force them to take the risk.

If they do get the implant, a character must take an *endurance* [10] check or contract the steel shakes. Since the symptoms are not evident immediately, it's best to either make this roll yourself in secret, or forgo sharing any details (i.e., just tell the player to roll the check without explaining what it's for or whether they succeeded).

If any customers return complaining about the steel shakes, the witch maintains that it's a problem with them, not the augmentation. Weak people sometimes reject augments, if they're strong the shakes will pass.

If they continue to complain, she gives them a small jar of pills (six doses) that they can use to remove the disadvantage caused by the steel shakes for one encounter.

Steel Shakes

Delayed Action Cybernetic Rejection Syndrome, or more commonly 'the steel shakes' is a life-threatening condition caused by poor cybernetic implantation surgery.

STEEL SHAKES

THRESHOLD	STAGE
20+	Healthy / Cured.
15–19	[Start] Disease is dormant.
10–14	All checks involving the new implant suffer 1d6 disadvantage.
5–10	Checks involving the new implant now suffer an *additional* 1d6 disadvantage.
< 5	The character goes into acute cybernetic rejection. The character must make death checks every round until the implant is removed

.TMP

Dot Temp is a wired bar that has been a fixture of the arkets almost since the beginning. Though its exact form varies with the location of the arket, the bar brings together many of the best fixers and information brokers into one place.

This season the Dot Temp has taken over a ground floor gym, with the main bar area being set around a large indoor pool. No one's swimming, it's not that kind of crowd, but coloured spotlights fracture and fragment off the waters rippling surface to create scintillating patterns on the ceiling and walls. The live musician is playing a Sialan, a kind of Averyn equivalent to the piano, and the soothing roll of the music creates a very different atmosphere to most of the wired bars you've visited. Almost civilised even.

There are a number of fixers working the floor, but Kline is not among them. This is not unusual for a broker of his stature; should the players touch base with one of the bartenders they'll be directed to a room upstairs.

Kline's Office

Kline's room is kept indirectly lit as befits his crepuscular nature.

The fixer is a Xuurthian; he is about the size of a large dog but completely furless and with hook like legs that he uses to suspend from the chains that clink across the roof of his temporary office. With everything in the room orientated to his perspective, you feel like you're standing on the roof as soon as you enter.

"Ahh _____, so good of you to visit. And the timing too. I have something for you…"

Kline should always start by greeting a member of the party (he's supposed to have worked with them before after all). Generally, pick the most mercenary of the party or, failing that, the most famous/recognisable.

As implied by his greeting, Kline should always have something for the players. This could be a job, or it could simply be information. If it is a job, remember that fixers don't *directly* hire people, they direct them to other employers.

The characters in the Quest Givers section (p.131) should provide some starting points. .TMP is a useful location because characters who might not normally be found in a wired bar, may well still be nearby.

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Species Notes

Morphologically, Xuurthians have six legs and two arms. Their 'legs' each end in a hooked appendage which is effective for climbing, but not for walking on land (much like a bats). Their arms end in relatively conventional hands with three fingers, a thumb, and a vestigial hook, much smaller than those on their legs.

Kline is just as mercenary as the people he hires out, and that is what makes him a great fixer. He champions no cause, not even the defeat of the Whisper.

This mercenary nature comes from the clutch of eggs that Kline has hidden in the city's metro tunnels. Xuurthians hatch almost full size, but they remain in their eggs for almost ten years. To keep them growing they must be kept in a nutrient bath of decaying proteins (the smell of which tends to make Xuurthians unpopular roommates for other species).

The egg clutch predates the Shatter (though it wasn't always hidden in the tunnels) and with the death of his mate, Kline believes he is the last surviving Xuurthian. This responsibility has made him extremely pragmatic over the last six years. He uses the money he makes as a fixer to secure the egg lair and stock it with supplies and learning materials that the fourteen offspring may need being born into the post-Shatter world.

Don't let this backstory trick you into thinking Kline is a compassionate figure. He'll sell any information he isn't paid (a lot) to keep secret, and he's the players' ally only so long as it's good business to be so.

Favoured Virtue: Quick witted

Favoured Vice: Casino royalty

THE EXCHANGE

The Exchange is where the big deals are made at the arket. Here a merchant from a survivor camp might sell several truckloads of raw copper pellets they've been collecting or refining for the last twelve months.

Such deals are strictly invite only, unless you have something to sell, you're not even allowed to observe.

This season the Exchange is located in a third-floor conference room overlooking the arket.

The Exchange is a critical feature of the arket, but not one you should bother your players with unless they have reason to go there. Besides having something to sell, this location is the most likely place to find high-level corporate representatives, should the players have business with them.

The Business of the Exchange

The Exchange operates by a complex system of silent auctioning that has some parallels to a stock market. Both the arcologies and the settlements will populate a board with types and volumes of items for sale.

Exchange staff are discretely notified by prospective purchasers and will update the board with the bids. If the highest bidder wants only a portion of the total goods, the remainder goes to the next highest bid and so on. All bids are finalised at the closing of the second day, but until this time, no money or goods are considered to have changed hands.

It's worth noting that such volumes of goods are generally kept off site, hidden at various warehouses nearby. These sites, and the goods within, must be confirmed by the Exchange staff ahead of the arket, but the location is revealed to no one but the purchasers. Ultimately the seller remains responsible for the security of the goods until they are collected.

The Board

The Exchange board is generally not an electronic device, though its exact form may vary depending on the space the exchange is setup in. At the twenty-first arket, the board is a series of whiteboards appended with magnetic plaques.

Non-Trading Business

The Exchange is one of the few times that highly-ranked members of the disparate survivor enclaves meet up. For this reason, it is inevitable that a small amount of discussion occurs beyond simply trading, but such deliberations are kept strictly limited and informal.

This caution dates back to the fate of Raker Construction. While Raker had numerous programs aimed at helping survivors, they were also attempting to bring the settlements and arcologies into formal cooperation. At the forth arket, they arranged talks to hash out such an agreement. Both the talks and the arket, ended abruptly with news that the Raker Arcology was under attack. The Raker representatives, and their ginbushi escorts, were ambushed and killed on the way back to their arcology.

This put an end to almost all attempts at alliances between survivors and saw a strict prohibition on summits during arkets.

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THE WELDING WITCH – STATS

Movement: 4 Dash, 8 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +3, Unskilled +3

Skilled (+6) in *engineering, medical*

DEFENCES

Cover 18 | Evade 13 | Base 5

IC Disconnected

Armour: Rugged Clothing – Padding

Wounds Tolerance: 2

Tactics and Gear

The Welding Witch is faster and sturdier than she looks. Given her lax standards, angry customers are a peril she's had to deal with before.

That said, she prefers not to fight herself, and will generally try to delay her opponents while moving at best speed towards the nearest ginbushi she can find. The ginbushi do not particularly like the Welding Witch, but her service, though low-quality, is provided as advertised.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +4 | *Aim* +0 | *Recoil* +4 | *Melee* +4

TALENTS

Anti-aug Toxin

All of the Welding Witch's weapons are laced with anti-aug poison.

At the start of their turn each round, the victim must succeed at an *endurance* [15] check or suffer a single minor wound to the head of the victim. Normally insubstantial, this small injury damages the delicate neural connections between the DNI and the brain.

Each time the victim suffers this wound, they must choose one of their augmentations which they are no longer able to operate. Heroic characters may suffer a point of mental trauma to use the augmentation despite the affliction.

Succeeding at the endurance check means the poison is metabolised but wounds caused remain.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Tantō

Range: Melee | AP: Fibreweave

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Run Through
[1–2]	[3–4]	[5–6]	

Concealable, increase AP to Ceramic if wielded with two hands

Shuriken

Range: Short | AP: Fibreweave

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Run Through
[1]	[2–5]	[6]	

Concealable. Can make volley attacks or, if wielded with both hands, can make autofire attacks.

In a round where a character makes no other attack, a shuriken may be thrown as an incidental.

KLINE – STATS

Movement: 6 Dash, 12 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +3, Unskilled +1

Skilled (+7) in *react, stealth, acrobatics, intuition (people), intuition (places/things), spycraft, urbcraft*

DEFENCES

Cover 22 | Evade 15 | Base 5

IC Disconnected

Armour: Kline's natural carapace is equivalent to fibreweave except at the weak points which have no effective natural armour. Atop this he wears clothing, but not armour

Wounds Tolerance: 1

Tactics and Gear

On their homeworld, or with access to their particular combat technology, Xuurthians can be formidable opponents. Kline has access to neither, so his main objective in any fight is to escape and let other, dangerous individuals do the fighting for him.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +6 | *Aim* +3 | *Recoil* +0 | *Melee* +5

WEAPON ATTACKS

Leg Hook Slash

Range: Melee | AP: Fibreweave

Grazed	Lacerated	Crippled	Cleaved
[1]	[2–4]	[5–6]	

On a successful attack the Xuurthian can pull a creature off the ground. Victims only get an opposed force check if they can immediately grab some fixture.

Blade Tumble

If a Xuurthian begins a round with a target grabbed and held off the ground, they may spend a complex action to make four leg hook slash attacks against that target.

Auto Pistol

Range: Medium | AP: Fibreweave

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Shot through
[1]	[2–4]	[5]	[6]

Burst fire

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HOUSE GUARD SNIPERS - STATS

Movement: 4 Dash, 8 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +3, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+4) in *drive, spot/listen*

DEFENCES

Cover 17	Evade 12	Base 5
	IC Disconnected	

Armour: Fibreweave vest over a corporate uniform

Wounds Tolerance: Minion

Tactics and Gear

Chosen from the best marksmen in the house guards, these individuals are issued heavy rifles and given additional training. Generally, they will operate as a pair, one manning the rifle and the other using binoculars and other optics to scan a larger area and identify targets.

At the arket, the snipers are actually performing counter-sniper duty, searching for hostile counterparts to thwart. Should the arket be attacked in force, the snipers are directed to evacuate immediately (most have to descend a lot of floors before they can reach the ground and escape).

Outside of arket duty, house guard snipers are sometimes employed to eliminate major threats, such as suzerains, in advance of an attack. Only in times of dire need would a corporate sniper be directed to 'fire at will' against a large enemy force.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +4	*Aim* +6	*Recoil* +4	*Melee* +1

WEAPON ATTACKS

Submachine gun

Range: Medium — AP: Ceramic

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Shot Through
[1]	[2–4]	[5]	[6]

Two-handed, burst, autofire , +1d6 to snap instead of aim

Heavy Rifle

Range: Extreme — AP: Steel

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2]	[3–4]	[5–6]

Setup (simple), two-handed, LAV

MERCHANT BODYGUARD - STATS

Movement: 5 Dash, 10 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +4, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+5) in *athletics, force, endurance, urbcraft*

DEFENCES

Cover 20	Evade 14	Base 5
	IC 6	

Armour: Combat Armour – Padding with ceramic torso and head protection

Wounds Tolerance: 1

Tactics and Gear

Merchant bodyguards are ninety percent bravado and ten percent skill. Their focus is intimidating people *out* of fighting, rather than ending up in a scrap. If forced into a fight, these individuals will focus on getting their charge to safety. Where possible, they will avoid shooting at all, not wanting to look like a guilty party when the ginbushi show up.

Most have at least one cybernetic augment that enhances build.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +5	*Aim* +0	*Recoil* +5	*Melee* +3

WEAPON ATTACKS

Tonfa

Range: Melee — AP: Padding

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Shotgun

Range: Short — AP: Fibreweave

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1-2]	[3–5]	[6]	

Two-handed
When firing the shotgun roll once for damage, but three times for hit location at short range, or five times at point blank.

William Kwan (Quote: 36187234)

INFERNO FIGMENT

The inferno figment is an example of the sort of augmented reality illusion that the Whisper aspects will drop when they are personally interested in a situation.

In our test games, we applied this to the Denim Neural Robotics building when the heroes returned to collect their first Orikasa Fragment, but it's not bound to any particular site or setup.

Note that this figment can be extremely lethal. We recommend maybe one decent opponent within the figment area (we like to use a collector) but otherwise let the hazards themselves provide the challenge.

Give your disconnected the heads up

The disconnected players can make or break your figment, so take the time to get them on board. For this figment take your disconnected players aside before the session and paraphrase the following:

"Guys I need your help to do something really cool for the other players, the area you're about to head into *appears* to be on fire. You can safely move through any areas that I indicate are on fire, or otherwise appear to be damaged by fire or smoke. I may at times say, 'everyone suffers a wound from the heat' or similar, in these cases you don't count as 'everyone'.

What you *cannot* do is explain the situation to the other players as it will ruin their experience. Remember the Whisper is affecting *minds*, not sight. When you say, 'the building is fine, it's a trick' they hear 'oh my god, oh my god the building is on fire!'. Likewise, when you step into the fire, your allies are going to think you're getting horribly burned.

You're of course welcome to try and guide your fellows through the situation in any other way that makes sense, you just can't explain, or even suggest, that they've encountered an illusion.

If you're really uncertain what's an illusion and what's not, just say you have a question and we'll step aside and hash it out. That's it, have fun being the only ones who know the secret!"

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APPROACH

As you get closer to your destination, you notice plumes of smoke rising from the building. Increasing your pace, you begin to understand the scale of the problem.

Fire has seared away the shutters of the upper windows and spilled out into the sky. Grey silty smoke cascades upwards like a perverse cape, billowing in the wind, and though the building still stands, you can tell from the scale of the conflagration that the artefact you seek will be burned to ash if you don't act fast.

But there is one thing that gives you pause, the Whisper here is so much more – it has become a rasping half-vocalised shout so real it has a tangible weight and so encompassing it has a spiritual presence. You feel less like the Whisper is ambient and more like it is right here and talking right to you, and you swear you're hearing words amongst the mesh of nonsense.

You want to turn back, the Whisper tells you to turn back, it demands it until you feel like you're pushing your very thoughts against a head wind.

GETTING INSIDE

The inferno inside greets the fresh air from the opening door with a wave of ravenous heat. You stagger back, not just from the force of the temperature, but from the sudden roar of the Whisper that intermingles with that of the flames inside.

You gather your wits and plunge in. Hot billows of smoke roil about the ceiling, clawing at your lungs. It's so thick that even the brilliance of the fire doesn't always pierce through, and occasionally you stumble into a wall, its surface searing to the touch, before you even see it. This is madness, you need to get your work done and be gone before you're all cooked.

HAZARDS

The players who believe the building is on fire are subject to the following hazards.

Smoke

On the first floor, the players have to take an *endurance* [10] check every round to avoid the effects. On the second floor/further in the difficulty increases to 15.

First fail = shortness of breath, no long dash actions.

Second fail = severe shortness of breath, 1 dash or simple action per round only.

Third fail = players suffer a *choking* wound each round. If they have no wounds tolerance left, they fall unconscious.

Unconscious characters who fail, are now dying. They must make a death of a hero check each time they fail the smoke endurance check.

Heat

Being in the extreme heat will quickly start to take its toll. Each round each player takes an *endurance* [10] check, and on failure, they're damaged as below:

Heat Burns			
AP: Special		Range: Melee	
Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated
[1–3]	[4–5]	[6]	
Armour of padding or above reduces the wound by one category. Armour cannot negate this damage completely.			

Burning debris

Anytime a player rolls a 1 on any *endurance* check, burning debris fall on them from above. Roll a hit location, that location is on fire.

Players must then make a *react* [10] check, and if they fail another location is on fire. Keep rolling until they succeed.

The round that a location is on fire, and every round after, it takes:

Fire Damage			
AP: Unarmoured		Range: Melee	
Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated
[1–3]	[4]	[5]	[6]
Fire increases its AP by 1 category each round.			

A player can drop and roll to put themselves out – a *react* [8] check will completely extinguish them.

Each round that they don't, the fire spreads to the hit locations on either side of it.

Location-based hazards

Map the party's most likely route through the area, and then arrange some obstacles to make their route less simple. A wall of impenetrable flames, a ceiling that collapses just as they get close.

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Don't get too carried away. A character in your party with no ranks in *endurance* and 3 wounds will last an average of 8 rounds in this environment. A character with breathing gear and an abundance of wounds points will last much longer. Since your party is likely to have a mix of both, you should assume your party will have about eight rounds to get in and back out.

ENDING THE FIGMENT

Put some thought into how you would reveal that some of the events experienced were a figment. There are a few possibilities here.

Let the disconnected do it

Once the party have escaped and the session is wrapped up, have the disconnected player reveal what they learned.

Have the figment end

When the players get far enough away the Whisper settles and they glance back to realise the building is completely intact, not a trace of smoke in the sky.

If the players are recovering an Orikasa Fragment, you could have the figment end abruptly and dramatically once the players collect the piece.

ADDING TO THE FIGMENT

If you want to add to this figment, or create your own, keep in mind that less is more. As the GM, you're going to have a lot going on, and details that require players to take one or more checks per round can be forgotten easily or worse, can slow play down and distract from the action. A very complex figment will also make it difficult for your partners in crime, the disconnected, to keep track of what is safe for them and what isn't.

GINBUSHI LEADERSHIP PRIMER I

The hierarchy of the ginbushi can be complex. Within the clans the majority all share a single rank: 'True' or 'Bladed' Samurai, yet they will be called on to perform very different tasks. This is because the ginbushi ranking structure is largely subsumed beneath an informal ranking system based on respect.

A ginbushi master may technically give orders to a bladed samurai, but to a bladed samurai of greater unspoken rank, he may only make requests. Of course to openly refuse such a request would be a huge insult, and such a respected samurai would not do so lightly.

You will have to develop a sense of the informal ranks over time from your own interactions with the clans. This text will cover the formal ranks that all ginbushi respect (at least theoretically).

SHOGUN

Commonly translated to 'first among equals', the shogun is unique to the Ebonsnow clan, answering directly to the Duke of the Verdant Crest. The shogun is, in most respects, equivalent to a house father or mother, until a member of the Imperial family calls up the other clans under the Imperial Samurai Act. In that event, the Shogun is considered senior to all other House leaders.

AWETECH-0

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

QUEST GIVERS

The information and stat blocks in this section are for characters who might provide the heroes with work. We provide some suggestions on where one might meet them, but ultimately these individuals can be dropped into the setting of your choice, perhaps even seeking the players out.

JACEN FONG – JADED SURVIVOR

Jacen Fong was thrown out of a settlement and is now looking for revenge. He clearly illustrates the darker side of the no-augs policy.

This is a man with nothing to lose if ever you saw one. Messy black hair, sunken eyes, and an abbreviated ear that looks like a nearly fatal brush with a firearm.

Still he has a focused expression that describes a man with a purpose, a plan, and perhaps most importantly, the keen intellect of a man who doesn't stay down.

Jacen hears voices – deceased relatives, people he'd slighted, people he felt owed him, and most recently the Whisper. He tends to be extremely rational in his problem solving, but often extremely irrational in his motives. Once he almost starved from not eating because "there was archaeology in the food", yet this same man cracked the password on an emergency storehouse by studying the belongings of its owner and guessing their most likely choices.

Being kicked out of the settlement that served as his home has not been a stabilising element for Jacen. Where once he strove to be accepted by other humans, he now sees himself as something else, a competing evolutionary force that must survive.

Favoured Virtue: Assertive

Favoured Vice: Better than life

Finding Jacen

Jacen is most likely at a wired bar, looking for mercenaries. While any fixer should be able to link the players up with him, keep in mind this may reduce the fixer's credibility in the players' eyes. Even without knowing his ultimate objective, Jacen is clearly not particularly stable, and most players would expect a fixer to detect that.

If you *do* want a trusted and respected fixer to direct the players to Jacen, consider having them do it only out of desperation. The players are insisting they need work and there's none to be had elsewise. Such a fixer should warn the players to be cautious and suggest that if they have the capability, they should take a week off and come back looking for better prospects.

Available Quests

Jacen wants to get back at his former settlement. This can provide you with some darker quests should your group be somewhat antisocial.

Alternatively, this could be a bait and switch – Jacen providing a series of quests that seem to be coming from a good place until the final piece falls into place. Recovering high-wattage capacitors from a transformer station could deny the settlement power, while looking like a perfectly reasonable salvage operation. Clearing some 'traps laid during the Shatter to allow salvagers through' could open an avenue of attack to the settlement it had not expected. Ultimately these jobs should become gradually more suspicious until, at some point, the players get wise just in time to save the settlement (or just too late if you're being fatalistic).

In either event, Jacen is not rich, but he is observant, so his first quest should probably involve the players recovering something extremely valuable (an industrial water filter couldn't be a bad idea for this). Jacen sells this item immediately and, in turn, uses its value to continue hiring the players.

Jacen is also an interesting subject because he is immune to the Whisper. It might be that he's simply too mad to be affected, or it might be that something in his brain waves can be utilised to protect others. Even after his death, recovering brain scans of Jacen Fong could provide an alternative to the Orikasa Fragments as a way to shield from the Whisper.

Background

Jacen is connected, but not augmented, and unlike many of his kind, he did not reveal his plight in the first days after the Shatter. He learned long ago that others did not respond well to the idea that someone believed they were hearing voices. Doctors would get involved and Jacen did not like doctors.

So Jacen hid his wireless access and lived as though he were one of the disconnected in a settlement for years. Some of his behaviours were considered odd, but many people had developed neurosis from the Shatter,

William Kwan (Quote: 36187234)

and someone occasionally answering questions they weren't asked, wasn't as uncommon as it had once been.

Which settlement Jacen lived in is up to the GM, but they should be intolerant of augmented, and if all else fails East Block is a reasonable default. While the settlements quickly acquired the tools and know-how to identify such a ruse, Jacen was already established by the time this happened, and no one thought to scan the settlement's founder members.

Eight months ago, Jacen suffered a head injury when a floor collapsed on a scavenging expedition. His colleagues feared the injury might be serious and took him to Magnolia (the closest well-equipped surgeon at the time). While she was able to inform them that the injury wasn't as severe as they'd feared, her scans also detected his DNI

The scavenger team was furious at Jacen, both for what he'd done, and for what he was. They took him, still under sedation, to a relatively safe location and abandoned him with just enough supplies to last the night. When he awoke, the only explanation of his predicament, was a curt letter explaining that he was exiled, and that further attempts to enter the settlement would be met with deadly force.

JACEN FONG – STATS

Movement: 4 Dash, 8 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +4, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+6) in *Spot/listen, Stealth Defeat Security, Disguise, Sleight of Hand, Urbcraft*

DEFENCES

Cover 20	Evade 17	Base 5
	IC 10	

Armour: Rugged Clothing – Padding

Wounds Tolerance: 3

Tactics and Gear

In a fight, Jacen is coldly methodical. Where possible he'll attempt to isolate his opponents and apply overwhelming force. He believes his survival is mandated, which means both that he will avoid 'certain death' scenarios and that he will tend to overestimate his abilities.

If trapped in close combat with a superior aggressor, Jacen is not above sticking a pocket mine to the target on a six second timer (1 round). While his target scrambles to remove the mine, Jacen makes his escape. As a coldly calculating combatant, Jacen obviously won't attempt this on an opponent he knows doesn't value its own life (like a berserker).

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +4	*Aim* +6	*Recoil* +3	*Melee* +3

TALENTS

Too Many Voices

By some trick of fate, Jacen is immune to the Whisper and any wireless attacks by its agents. He is not, however, afforded the same protection versus wireless attacks from others (like network ghosts)

WEAPON ATTACKS

Heavy Pistol

Range: Medium — AP: Ceramic

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Two handed

Pocket Mine

Range: Melee — AP: Ceramic

Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

The detonator on a sticky bomb can be set to either proximity or timed. A proximity charge will detonate as soon as a character (friend or foe) moves within 1 or 2 squares of it (as chosen at the time of placement). The proximity charge arms at the end of the players' following turn to allow escape time.

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SORA KISHI – SHOGUN OF THE GINBUSHI

Sora Kishi is the House Mother of the Imperial Ebonsnow ginbushi and, by extension, the shogun of all ginbushi. She is also not who she appears to be.

During the Shatter Orikasa used her abilities to seize control over Sora and force her to perform the Jin Mastery ritual on the mortally wounded Asur. Sora's body remains, but her mind and psych were overwritten with the consciousness of the Averyn Whiteblade.

Sora is a logical quest giver for the recovery of the Orikasa fragments. Certainly, no character is more interested in their recovery than her. Sora is also useful because her mixed past will make her quite secretive (allowing the GM more control over the pace at which players receive information) and her position requires her to stay with the fleet despite being extremely capable as a fighter.

You pass through another airlock and out into a Japanese garden whose domed glass looked out onto the slowly rolling starscape. The glass is shattered in two places and the garden frozen over by the cold of vacuum. The tiny stream that once ran through it is now a constellation of shimmering ice globes that float about. The carefully placed rocks look no different but the plants have either turned white with frost or lost their leaves completely.

It is, bar none, the stillest place you have ever been. Even the movement of the stars and ice seem only to accentuate the unmoving stones and plants, the unmoving silence.

And at the centre of this place where time has stopped is Master Sora, her seven-fold hakarma skirt and the long sleeves of her robe move not at all in the forever of airless space. She kneels facing away from you, her swords on her left but her pose meditative.

Given the practical effects of vacuum you take her for dead until she abruptly begins to stir, rising slowly and turning to face you. Her face reflects the garden, a clock stopped, a still world, captured in a moment of defeat.

Words do not travel in vacuum so after collecting her weapons she bows a little to each of you and gestures that you should return inside.

At his core Asur, like Orikasa, believes it his responsibility to defeat the Whisper. Finding himself reborn in Sora's body he believed he had been spared for a reason. As broken hearted as he was by Orikasa's apparent death he believed he was meant to go on.

This sense of purpose was steadily worn down as defeats against the Whisper mounted and no means of victory without Orikassa, even at a small scale, became apparent. Further attempts just cost further lives so eventually Sora withdrew from the fight.

Now she waits. Either destiny will reveal its intentions, or she will wilt away in a broken garden on a ruined ship and let less flawed warriors find the answer.

The arrival of the players with the first Orikasa fragment could change everything.

Favoured Virtue: Humble

Favoured Vice: A sip of brandy

Found at

The fleet remnant have returned to the Gitelman system and Sora spends her time in isolation on wreck of the *Rustung der Kostenlos.* Her ongoing meditations have begun to unsettle the fleet and if the senior officers had any workable plan they'd have likely long ago implemented it without her approval.

Available Quests

Sora is an excellent choice for mid-to-late campaign quest giver (assuming your campaign is about defeating the Whisper). She is one of few characters who knows the full story and is perhaps more invested than any other character the players are likely to come across (at least until Orikasa is reassembled).

The more the players succeed, the more Sora will see them as sharing in the critical destiny to stop the Whisper.

Background (Sora Kishi)

The original Sora was a formidable warrior, brilliant strategist and powerful orator. She was the daughter of two Ebonsnow ginbushi and it was always expected that she would follow in their footsteps.

Until her aspirant training Sora allowed herself to be carried along by her parents wishes. It was there that she met Holywyn, an Averyn aspirant being groomed to someday be the next shogun and leader of the Ebonsnow.

William Kwan (Quote: 36187234)

Somewhere along the line a determination to outperform this presumed favourite became a desire to be the first human shogun of the ginbushi. To outperform *all* the Averyn ginbushi.

Thus, began a trend of tireless work and constantly xceeding her masters expectations. Like many before her Sora mastered the sword and bow, but she also studied the great military leaders of old, both human and alien. She learned their tactics and strategies, but also how they led their people, how they handled the politics inherent in high level postings. Further she went to great lengths to prove her loyalty to the Empire and its principles. She was not striving to overthrow the Averyn, she was simply striving to demonstrate the worthiness of humanity and part of that worthiness meant an appreciation of the Empires contribution to galactic civilisation.

In 2139, almost inevitably, she was elevated to House Mother and Shogun. Though not a great reformer, she was widely regarded as an excellent leader and certainly an exemplar for other humans.

When the Shatter hit the majority of the local Imperial Admiralty were lost early to the Whisper. Sora took charge of the fleet, despite having no clear place in the fleets chain of command. Orikasa may have been the necessary instrument of its survival on the digital battlefield, but it was *both* Sora and Asur who kept it intact in the physical space.

That said Sora never really trusted Orikasa and she struggled with the notion that there was no way the fleet itself could defeat this threat. It took her some time just to grasp that the Whisper could not be 'isolated' by destroying planar relays. When she finally accepted it as a planar entity she insisted on sending scouting groups into planar space to 'find the beasts lair' despite Orikasa's assertion that there was nothing to find.

Background (Asur val Kosmar)

Not all Averyn have auspicious upbringings. Asur's family had been involved in a poorly managed colony start up and their fortunes were further undermined when his mother was crippled by a degenerative muscle condition.

While there were medical treatments back on Avner that could have corrected the problem, such things were well out of reach of the Kosmar family, both geographically and financially.

These family struggles gave birth to Asur's early interest in Tencom and Incarnadine, and the ground-breaking work they were doing on cybernetics. He applied early and often to both companies but his interest in their work vastly surpassed his aptitude for it.

Ultimately a Whiteblade master came across his many applications and realised they suggested an individual of commitment and drive, traits that were the bedrock of the ginbushi.

In his probationary trial in the house guard Asur quickly demonstrated his mental discipline was accompanied by great physical fortitude as well. Soon enough he was accepted into the ranks of the Whiteblade aspirants and went on to win his blade in record time. Tencom saw to it that his mother received a suite of augmentations to correct her condition and in doing so guaranteed Asur's loyalty.

By the time of project WSP-3R Asur was regarded as the top blade master in the clan and was expected to replace the current house master sometime in the next decade. Had the Whiteblades offered any lesser protector, it's likely the Averyn Guard would have insisted in sending a detachment of their own to guard Olicia.

While Asur's relationship with Orikasa started on Mannheim, the events on Paligar bound them together forever. Alone among the team Asur knew of Orikasa's plan to raise an army of digital consciousnesses and return to Paligar to destroy the Whisper.

What he didn't know was that Orikasa would ascend herself when they realised the Whisper had come with them back to the capital. This was a change he never really got a chance to process as the pair faced off against the Whisper.

Asur lacked Sora's strength of personality but he keenly grasped the nature of the Whisper and had no issue working with Orikasa. He acted as a critical conduit between the two, forcing each to come to a compromise so the fleet could move forwards.

When Orikasa died and Asur found himself thrust into Sora's place, both literally and figuratively, he was not ready. Initially he used the defeat at the Gitelman system as an excuse for being more distant and aloof than the charismatic Sora would have been. Ultimately he had no choice but to reveal to a few key senior officers what had happened and then predominantly operated through them.

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The fleet officials who know Sora's secret do not altogether approve, but they understand the fragility of the fleets morale, and the importance of Sora's legendary status within it. More importantly they have no better idea how to face the Whisper than Asur does and frankly most don't want the responsibility of presiding over the end of mankind.

SORA KISHI – STATS

Movement: 7 Dash, 14 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +6, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+10) in *resist, react, endurance, acrobatics, civilised lore, intuition (places/things), warcraft*

DEFENCES

Cover 28	Evade 24	Base 5
	IC 18	

Armour: Dō-maru – fibreweave with ceramic torso and head protection

Wounds Tolerance: 5

Tactics and Gear

Sora is capable and aware of her capability. She will not hesitate to take on vastly superior numbers, confident that her combat abilities will see her through intact. Indeed Sora views it as her responsibility to be a focal point of the enemy, thus relieving pressure on her own forces.

Unless absolutely necessary Sora will avoid making ranged attacks. Although she carries a flashbow, she no longer possesses the sublime mastery of the real Sora. If anyone saw her use the weapon, hit or miss, they would recognise a clumsiness that did not befit an Ebonsnow master.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +10	*Aim* +8	*Recoil* +6	*Melee* +12

Feats of Skill: 3

Feats of Will: 3

TALENTS

Heijoshin III

Off-turn action

A ginbushi may evade the first three successful attacks against it per round. If caught in a blast, a ginbushi may draw from the same pool to turn a failed *react* check into a success and move further from the blast.

If attacked in melee by a character who possesses *heijoshin III* or greater, this talent may not be used.

Heijoshin Mastery

Incidental

The ginbushi may spend a feat of will, and all attacks against it count as misses until the beginning of its next turn.

Chugi

Incidental

The ginbushi may spend a feat of will to immediately cure a poison, disease, or serious wound.

Meiyo Mastery

Incidental

Spend a feat of skill to begin a combo chain. So long as no attack misses, you may make an additional follow-up attack.

Rei Mastery

Incidental

Spend a feat of will, and you may retaliate versus every attack that misses you until the beginning of your next turn.

Breathing in the Dark

Incidental

Spend a feat of will to begin a meditative trance. While in this state your nanites will form a protective pressure shell over the surface of your skin and perform oxygen filtration functions. This allows a user to survive in pressures between 0 and 2 atmospheres for as long as the trance is maintained.

Maintaining the trance is a simple action, however anytime a character suffers a wound of any kind they must make a *resist* [15] check or lose control of the trance.

Weak Yumi Technique

This character suffers a -6 anytime they make an attack with any type of bow or flash bow.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Nano-forged Katana – Earth's Grace

AP: Ceramic — Range: Melee

Grazed	Lacerated	Crippled	Cleaved
	[1]	[2–3]	[4–6]

When wielded with two hands, the AP can be upgraded to steel.

If a character other than the owner attempts to wield this weapon, they will be attacked by the nanites within.

Steel Wakizashi

AP: Fibreweave — Range: Melee

Grazed	Lacerated	Crippled	Cleaved
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

When wielded with two hands, the AP can be upgraded to ceramic.

Yumi Flash Bow –Amaterasu

Range: Long — AP: Steel

Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated
[1]	[2]	[3-4]	[5-6]

Concealed, silent

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MORI OGAWA – RETIRED VISIONARY

Mori Ogawa is a genius with a conscience. He can't let the Whisper continue to oppress humanity, and he believes he has some idea of how to stop it, but he can't do it alone.

You recognise this man on sight, Mori Ogawa, one-time CEO of Incarnadine Human Augmentation, and in a very real way – the father of cybernetics.

That he survived the Shatter is amazing, he'd been old back in the 2120s when augmentation first kicked off; now he's balanced precariously between a cane and the supporting arms of his assistant.

His body may be unsteady, but you can see on his face that his determination isn't.

Mori Ogawa is compassionate to a fault, and he knows it. He tends to plan at a high level because, pragmatically, he knows that any success versus the Whisper will have a cost in lives. Confronted with that tragedy directly, he doubts his resolve would hold.

With decades of experience in the corporate world, Mori has become a strong judge of character – though he does have a blind spot where Averyn are concerned. In 2121 the sector court ruled the humanity could not be allowed to use species-selective augmentation as a political tool and overturned Tencom and Incarnadines patents, Mori saw it as a ploy to keep the Averyn on top. Since that day he distrusts the Averyn in all matters.

Favoured Virtue: Noble

Favoured Vice: Gullible

Found at

Mori is very high on the Whisper's hit list, and it has actually deployed a specialist suzerain hunter to track him and kill him. After a couple of close shaves with this creature, Mori has made a point of keeping a low profile. His new home is a relatively comfortable apartment across the river from the Blinds.

Most likely the players will encounter his assistant first, looking to hire mercenaries from a wired bar. Alternatively, the players could come across the remains of a previous team hired by Mori and track something on their person back to Mori's hideout.

Either way, the players should only be entitled to meet with Mori after they've proven themselves in some way.

Available quests

Mori is trying to find a way to defeat the Whisper, and he might just be smart enough to do it. He should provide the players with a range of missions, collecting obscure pieces of technology, extracting former colleagues from draconian contracts with arcologies, and protecting delicate experiments from the Whisper.

The culmination of all this could be a hardware system capable of tethering an aspect and providing another alternative to recovering the Orikasa Fragments. Alternatively, it could just be a very effective firewall that requires a large amount of space – enough to equip a starship, but too large for personal use.

While the latter would present a heart-breaking failure for Mori, it would be a profound opportunity for the players.

Background

Before the advent of cybernetics, Mori was a specialist in neural-linked prosthetics for a relatively small medical research company called Incarnadine Medical Engineering. Even prior to Tencom's DNI, Incarnadine was the leader in responsive medical prosthetics, but the technology was hit and miss, everyone's neural pathways were different, and using a neural-linked prosthetic took some people months of mental training. For some it seemed impossible.

When it came along, the DNI seemed to be the catalyst Mori was waiting for. Inside twelve months, they had a prosthetic anyone could use and cornered the medical market. Limiting prosthetics to 'just as good' seemed unnecessary to Mori, so he pushed the technology. The Olympian range was born, and shortly thereafter augmentation took off.

The hit Incarnadine took when the Empire overturned their patents was almost unrecoverable, but Mori had another trick up his sleeve – cerebral augmentation. While competitors were crowding onto the market to make people stronger and faster, Incarnadine looked for ways to make them smarter. Once he'd proven he could do that, Mori turned to nano-augmentation.

But not all was well between Mori and his investors. Despite being the pioneer of every major development in post-DNI cybernetics, Incarnadine was somehow still struggling, and its investors weren't happy. They wanted Incarnadine to be the next Tencom, but under Mori's guidance, the company's manufacturing and sales sector was always a fraction of the size of its research arm. Worse still, Mori insisted that the company remain

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priced for its 'core customer base' which was hospitals seeking augmentation as prosthetics. Even the cerebral augmentation was being practically given away to aid adults with learning disabilities or Alzheimer, when many in the corporation maintained it should have been used exclusively to give their own staff an edge.

Things came to a head over the nanotech augmentation project. The investors wanted to cut a deal with the Empire to militarize the tech, Mori refused and maintained that he'd rather see the patents overturned again than the tech denied to the common person.

Mori was forced to step down as CEO, and the company as a whole stepped back from the limelight. The public reputation they'd built helping hospitals was not as valuable as the private one they now had with the other zaibatsu and the ginbushi.

Losing control of the company he'd started was the one thing Mori couldn't recover from. He continued to tinker away in the Incarnadine labs for ten more years, and while he made several incremental improvements, his golden age seemed to be over. In 2139 he retired, taking a large severance package that stipulated he not take work in the cybernetics field for any other organisation so long as Incarnadine still existed.

Had the Shatter not hit, Mori might have lived out his days unremarkably at that point. Genius or not, Mori nearly died in the Shatter, only his daughter's grit and determination kept him alive.

With the Whisper hunting them so aggressively, they could not join other survivors, and so it took years to setup a safe lab, and years more to stock it with even basic equipment.

MORI OGAWA – STATS

Movement: 0 Dash, 4 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +1, Unskilled +5

Skilled (+12) in *resist, computer use, engineering, intuition (people)*

DEFENCES

Cover 20	Evade 10	Base 5
	IC 20	

Armour: Fine clothing. Skull and chest augmentation provides the equivalent of ceramic protection

Wounds Tolerance: 0

Tactics and Gear

Mori really cannot fight a physical confrontation and prefers not to anyway. He believes the lost can be cured, so he doesn't really want their blood on his hands, to say nothing of ordinary human opponents.

Retreating is the obvious strategy, but with such limited mobility, the old man knows it is often better to find cover and wait for his moment. He does possess a Type II DNI, and he will use his mental abilities to help his allies, though he will generally stop short of inflicting actual harm on his foes.

Mori has no qualms, however, about destroying the Whisper's creations such as collectors and banshees.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +0 *Aim* +1 *Recoil* +0 *Melee* +0

TALENTS

Venerable to a fault

Because of his advanced age, Mori is extremely unsteady and cannot move quickly. He may move (counting as a long dash) or take actions, but not both.
This condition cannot be repaired through augmentation.

Tech Curse

Incidental, once per round, +12 attack vs IC

Target a single piece of wireless-linked electronics. That item is jammed up and cannot perform any action until the beginning of next round.

A car is not a single piece of electronics; however; its brake controls or its GPS are. On an augmented being, each separate augment is considered a piece of electronics.

Affecting augmented or robots requires a roll versus their IC defence.

Wall Program

Simple Action

Create a wall that covers one edge of two squares (or it can corner one square) and lasts until the end of the encounter. The wall may be anywhere between one and two metres tall and is semi-transparent.

The program is only visible to machines and augmented individuals (friendly or otherwise), but they may not attack or move through it and must treat it in every respect as a solid object.

Decompile

Simple Action, +9 attack vs IC

Launch an attack directly against an active program. Simple programs (walls, decoys etc.) are destroyed automatically. More complex programs (like banshees) that have a Wounds Tolerance will instead suffer a point of mental trauma.

If the target has an IC defence, a successful attack roll must be made against it.

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WEAPON ATTACKS

Unarmed			
Range: Melee		AP: -	
Clipped [1-4]	Fractured [5]	Shattered [6]	Pulverised

AKANE OGAWA – MORI'S ASSISTANT

Mori would not have survived long without the constant assistance of his daughter. Before the players receive any quests from Mori, they will likely work through Akane.

Akane could even accompany the party from time to time, though you should definitely tone down her equipment and talents should you intend to do this in the early game. Remember it is the players' story, not Akane's

A tall androgynous figure with electric blue hair and the silver irises of a ginbushi. She makes almost no sound when she walks, and her full-length cloak, pinned closed at the shoulder, could be hiding any number of weapons.

Like her father, Akane is a fast learner, but there the similarities end. Where he is cerebral, she is physical, where he is circumspect, she is direct and often impatient. Her devotion to her father was absolute even before the Shatter. Now she believes he can save the world as he once saved her.

Favoured Virtue: Courageous

Favoured Vice: Slave to the beat

Found at

Akane divides her time between Mori's hideout and wired bars where she coordinates with fixers to accomplish his goals. On occasion she also performs missions on her own, though this has become less frequent now that she and Mori have enough funds and influence to hire mercenaries.

Available Quests

Akane acts as a vehicle for providing the quests of Mori Ogawa. On some rare occasions, she may get the players to perform a mission Mori would never ask for (he's unlikely to order the assassination of a survivor, however necessary).

Background

Akane was an only child born to middle aged parents who struggled to understand her almost from the first day. She was raised in the impossibly far reaching shadow of an absent father figure who had changed the world. Her circumstance gave birth to a hatred of augmentation, and her desire to rebel grew over the years until finally she ran away. Barely a teenager, she joined a group of anarchists who lived off grid, committed vandalism, and wrote blogs about how much they hated the augmented.

Things changed suddenly when some of the group (including Akane) decided to beat up an augmented as a demonstration. They chose a known criminal, albeit a petty one, and took things further than they meant. The augmented died.

Unfortunately, that augmented was a paramour of the heir to the local Bleeding Crane leadership. The Crane responded with a demonstration of their own. Several augmented wakaishu were sent to the anarchists' hideout and shot everyone they found.

Mori was alerted when his missing daughter showed up in a hospital in a critical condition with multiple gunshot wounds. Even if they saved her, she would be paralysed from the neck down, requiring complete limb and spine augmentation just to restore mobility. Since Akane wasn't fourteen yet, she wouldn't be legally eligible for those treatments for some months.

When Akane came around, she and Mori talked for days about her options. Ultimately Mori made an offer he could never have made, never have gotten away with, had he not been the CEO of Incarnadine. Akane accepted.

Two days later, Akane became both the youngest augmented and the first nano-augmented human.

Akane had more guilt than she could readily handle. Her actions had killed her friends and somehow, she'd been chosen to survive. Not only that, she'd been given the choice of either adopting augmentation, or living a half-life forever. Either way, she'd be depending on her father's resources. Her choice to adopt nano-augmentation was grounded in the idea that she could at least kill herself if she had use of her hands.

But being the first human-trial of nano-augmentation changed the paradigm of her life. People wanted to see what she could do – and what she could do amazed them. Her family no longer passed over her in favour of their work, now she *was* part of their work.

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She began to understand what her father was trying to achieve and why. Somewhere in those first years after the shooting, she decided that was why she'd been the only survivor – she alone could help the great Mori Ogawa in ways others could not.

His demotion, and later retirement, hurt her almost more than him. She spent months trying to convince him not to give up, to find a new way to help, but she couldn't get through. As was her nature, she began to plan revenge – she still worked at Incarnadine, and that offered plenty of opportunities.

Her plan never came to fruition – the Shatter intervened.

When the Shatter hit, Akane left Incarnadine without explanation and went straight to Mori's residence. She arrived just in time to thwart the first of many attempts the Whisper would make on his life.

Since then, she has been indispensable, turning his plans into action.

AKANE OGAWA – STATS

Movement: 7 Dash, 14 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +6, Unskilled +3

Skilled (+10) in *resist, react, endurance, stealth, acrobatics*

DEFENCES

Cover 28	Evade 24	Base 5
	IC 18	

Armour: Combat Armour – Padding with ceramic torso and head protection

Wounds Tolerance: 4

Tactics and Gear

Akane likes to be first into battle and last out. She does not particularly value her own life and will sometimes take even unnecessary risks.

Though capable in melee, she prefers ranged combat, generally dual wielding her auto-pistols.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +10	*Aim* +8	*Recoil* +10	*Melee* +8

Feats of Skill: 4

Feats of Will: 3

TALENTS

Heijoshin III

Off-turn action

Akane may evade the first three successful attacks against her per round. If caught in a blast, she may draw from the same pool to turn failed *react* checks into successes and move further from the blast.

If attacked in melee by a character who possesses *heijoshin III* or greater, this power may not be used.

Chugi

Incidental

Akane may spend a feat of will to immediately cure a poison, disease or serious wound.

Meiyo Mastery

Incidental

Akane may spend a feat of skill to begin a *melee* combo chain. So long as no attack misses, she may make an additional follow-up *melee* attack

Rei Mastery

Incidental

Akane may spend a feat of will and retaliate against every attack that misses her until the beginning of her next turn.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Nano-forged wakizashi

Range: Melee — AP: Ceramic

Grazed	Lacerated [1–2]	Crippled [3–4]	Cleaved [5–6]

When wielded with two hands the AP can be upgraded to steel.

If a character other than the owner attempts to wield this weapon, they will be attacked by the nanites within.

Auto Pistol (x2)

Range: Medium — AP: Fibreweave

Nicked [1]	Punctured [2–4]	Pierced Deeply [5]	Shot through [6]

Burst fire

Dual wielding: Any natural roll above a 10 triggers an attack with the offhand weapon. A character may not make *aimed* shots while dual wielding

Anti-tank dart

Range: Short — AP: Ceramic

Singed [1]	Burned [2]	Charred [3–4]	Immolated [5–6]

Thrown, Blast 10, one-handed, uses 3 munitions

If no other attack is made this round, a dart may be thrown as an incidental action.

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ANITA RYAN – I-SEC ARCHIVIST

Anita Ryan may be the last I-Sec agent left on Hansei. She continues to search for a weakness in the Whisper under her codename: Logos.

A petite woman with mousey blond hair and a fierce glare that suggests backing down is no longer in her nature. She's augmented, the kind that would have been subtle before the Shatter, but maintenance has clearly been an issue, and gaps in the expensive plastiflesh show the casing beneath. Poor maintenance doesn't stop there, her clothes and even her organic body show signs – scars from injuries that were either badly stitched or left to heal naturally.

Anita Ryan had a good heart, but the Shatter has given her a dark streak. She joined I-Sec because she wanted to help others, and if someone in front of her needs help, she will generally provide it.

Where she deviates from her pre-Shatter idealism is concerning the Whisper – after two years held back by her superiors, her desire to defeat it is out of control. She wants revenge for the lives lost, not for any good it might do the survivors; and that means any cost is acceptable.

Favoured Virtue: Noble

Favoured Vice: Lives for luxury

Found At

Like most wiredivers, Anita Ryan operates out of a safe house for the most part. Ryan's safe house is located in an old chemical plant where she has incorporated local combustibles and corrosives into her defences.

Most fixers (and other wiredivers) know Logos, but don't know who she really is. For a price, these individuals can either get a message to her or provide a VPN tunnel the players can use to communicate themselves.

If the players are actively hunting the Whisper, it is entirely possible that Ryan may seek them out.

Available Quests

Because of her background knowledge, Anita Ryan could be a powerful ally for the players and she presents one possible avenue to learning about the Orikasa Fragments and their import. Although more capable than most survivors, Ryan knows her limits and prefers to use mercenaries rather than risk herself in a gunfight.

Wherever you decide to place your first Orikasa Fragment, it could be Logos that requests the players recover it. You could even tie her into the story earlier, having the players recover network isolated backups from interstellar communications relays. If you don't want your campaign to include the Imperial Fleet remnant, Ryan could be the guide who pushes the players to recover each next fragment.

Ryan's currently unbalanced personality also means she's perilously close to being a villain herself. As such, she could even be the focus of a quest, the players seeking her out to talk her down from implementing some plan that would have catastrophic consequences. In a particularly dark game she might be trying to digitise consciousnesses like Orikasa did, but without the medical background to do more than pile up corpses.

Background

Stationed on Mannheim during the Shatter, Anita Ryan was one of the few humans in I-Sec and had joined only recently. Being a junior archivist, she was kept away from the isolated Whisper code samples, and while others fell trying to unravel the Whisper, she learnt by documenting their efforts.

When Asur and Dr. Orikasa rallied the fleet, the three surviving members of the Mannheim I-Sec office joined them. After Orikasa was lost and the fleet badly damaged at the Battle of the Gitelman System, the I-Sec team struggled desperately to find another answer to the Whisper. Anita Ryan's theory that Orikasa may have survived was dismissed by her more senior colleagues.

She remained obedient for two more years before she deserted. Accompanying a recon group during a flyby of Hansei, she deployed to the surface in an escape pod. Attempting a rescue simply to punish her for desertion seemed pointless to the I-Sec team, so they covered up her departure as a secret assignment. Should she be able to prove her theory, I-Sec could protect her decision (and receive some amount of the credit).

For her part, Archivist Ryan had little to go on. She'd seen spikes of planar energy at the moment of Orikasa's demise, something her colleagues interpreted as Orikasa's code being blown apart. Only able to track one, Ryan determined it was targeted at Hansei, and it was this that led her to believe the spikes were not random fragments, but intentional transmissions.

Now on Hansei, she has been attempting to determine the arrival point of the transmission. Progress has

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been slow. Most of the first two years Ryan spent just learning how to survive in the field.

While she assists the local population where she can, she's aware that a single I-Sec officer would be swamped with both requests for help, and flat out accusations, should she reveal her identity. Instead she uses her I-Sec codename and makes a living as a wirediver in Aratayo.

ANITA RYAN – STATS

Movement: 5 Dash, 10 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +2, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+9) in *resist, spot/listen, stealth computer use, civilised lore, defeat security, disguise, spycraft*

DEFENCES

Cover 22	Evade 15	Base 5
	IC 16	

Armour: Infiltrator Armour – Fibreweave

Wounds Tolerance: 2

Tactics and Gear

Anita Ryan is a fierce combatant versus the Whisper and will focus on inflicting as much harm on her opponents as she can with each action. Despite her anger at the Whisper, she *is* capable of recognising that dying to destroy a few berserkers is pointless.

As a rule, she'll risk injury to help others, but not death. Her life, as she sees it, should be spent only if it means the Whisper dies too.

Ryan is heavily augmented, including an Enforcer Mindcuff, a Hercules Arm, a Hades' Firewall, and a Companion Coprocessor smart-linked to her tablet PC.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +4	*Aim* +4	*Recoil* +7	*Melee* +2

TALENTS

I-Sec Firewalls

I-Sec agents receive special software and training in complex meditative techniques to protect them from hackers. Ryan may roll twice for *resist* checks relating to wireless defence, choosing the highest. In the event of an attack on her IC defence, Ryan's aggressor must roll twice and choose the lowest.

This talent does not extend to the *gatekeeper* talent below.

Gatekeeper

Off-turn action, once per round

Once per round when an ally fails a *resist* check versus any form of wireless attack, she may reroll on their behalf, using her own *resist* skill. The better result applies.

Alternatively, if the wireless attack targets an IC defence, she may substitute her *resist* roll for the IC defence.

Quarantine

Simple action, once per encounter, granted by Mindcuff augment

Quickly seal off a dangerous program, AI, or augmented foe in line of sight. Roll a *computer use* check to set the difficulty for the quarantine.

The target may not launch any wireless attacks without first breaking the firewall put around them. At the end of each of their turns they may make a free *computer use* check versus the difficulty set initially.

IFF Failure

Off turn action, once per round

Once per round Ryan may immediately interrupt any successful attack roll by an augmented being or machine. She then selects a new target in sight of both herself and the attacker and transfers the attack, with the existing roll, to that target.

The new target may be an ally of the attacker but must otherwise be a plausible threat. To use this power, she must succeed at a *computer use* check versus the target's IC defence.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Particle Needler

Range: Medium — AP: Fibreweave

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Shot through
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Burst only, no munitions cost

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PART IV
DESIGNING A CAMPAIGN

CREATING YOUR OWN CAMPAIGN

While any one session adventure can be a load of fun, RPGs really shine across campaigns. Linking together multiple sessions allows the players to develop their heroes and affords you the opportunity to integrate them into the story. By the end of a campaign, your heroes will have had a unique experience tailored to their heroes and their playing style.

The good news is that, to create a memorable campaign, all you need is time, inspiration, and your favourite word processor (or a pen and paper if you have a flair for the archaic).

WHAT MAKES WST SPECIAL?

Wireless Soul Transmission is but the first of what will eventually turn into a series of games using evolutions on this gaming system.

To make a great campaign in Wireless Soul Transmission, you need to understand part of what defines this game system and its settings.

The borderless principles
We mentioned these in a sidebar before, but they apply as much to campaign creation as they do to real-time adjudicating.

Don't ever put barriers in your players' way to make your own life easier. Remember: that wall can be climbed, that lock can be picked or the door smashed; the players can go back to town if they forgot something, and if you put the end villain in front of the heroes in the first act there's nothing to stop them from shooting him in the face. Don't build your campaign assuming one solution.

Old magic is the best magic
The universe is littered with ancient technology and secrets. The longer they've been hidden, the more powerful they are. This is why the best equipment is in the *Mastery Guide*, it cannot be purchased from a store, it must be uncovered.

There is no loot grind
When players upgrade their equipment, it should be a step change, not a negligible increment. Ideally top-level equipment should have a personal significance, not just a mechanical one.

See the artefacts section on p.192 for more on integrating loot into your game.

There is no grind at all
Everything the players do should matter, even if it's sometimes not clear to them why until later. Don't waste the players time with 'random encounters' or assume that they must defeat a certain number of opponents before levelling up.

The world is not designed for the players
The enemy should have many weak troops, some moderate ones, and a handful of deadly specialists. This doesn't change as the players grow stronger, and it's perfectly reasonable that they might end up facing a foe they can barely harm, or one that can barely harm them (in time the former will become the latter). After all, the villain distributes his forces according to his priorities, not the players'.

The story IS designed for the players
Weak players should not be asked to assault the enemy's most vital assets, and others should try to warn them before they take a shortcut through a district full of lurking adversaries they can't defeat. As they grow stronger, they should be asked to shoulder more responsibility and encouraged to dare those places others fear to tread.

Taken together, the above principles should afford the players a real sense of progressing in strength in the world.

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Getting the Tone of the Universe Right

If you've read the *Play Guide*, and this far into the *Mastery Guide*, you're probably starting to get a feel for the unique tone of *Wireless Soul Transmission*, but we want to highlight a few specifics that indicate how some of that is achieved. Like everything else in the *Mastery Guide* you should remember that this is one way to build your world. The setting can be surprisingly flexible and if you want *Wireless Soul Transmission* to be a zombie apocalypse, or a Death Race style dystopia you just need to enhance some elements and reduce others.

Lost

"Ignore it, it's just a lost."

A sprinkling of lost should be a mandatory part of almost every scene. If the players enter a shopping mall they should find it deserted but for a handful of lost, some acting as cashiers for dusty designer clothing, others wandering around in small groups, appearing like shoppers but for their blank stares.

The key here is to make the familiar unfamiliar. From far enough away things might look normal, if a little sparsely populated, but up close there is a pervasive sense of wrongness. It should seem like the scavengers are real people moving through a poorly acted puppet show.

Berserkers

"But what's it doing here?"

Berserkers have a lot in common with the classic zombie: unintelligent, limited motor skills and a tendency to attack in large groups to name a few examples. While this is a connection your players will no doubt make, it is important to take advantage of the differences to keep your setting compelling.

The key thing is that while they are individually unintelligent, the groups are directed by the Whisper (or a suzerain). The heroes should never encounter berserkers with no evident purpose – they might be guarding something, patrolling an area, hunting someone, cutting off an escape route or gathering to attack a settlement.

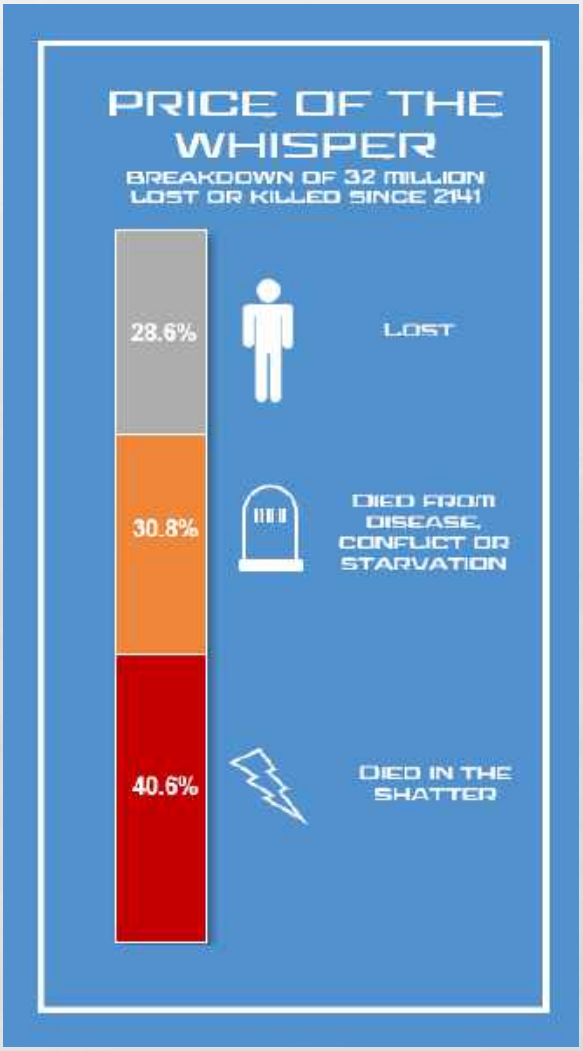
Not only should this make groups of berserkers inherently more threatening, it should also help build the sense of the Whisper as a terrible intellect of unclear objectives. Today the players might be doggedly pursued by a huge group of berserkers that seem to guess their every move, tomorrow they might see a similar group go right past them without paying them the slightest heed.

The Scarcity of Information

"How many people do you think survived?"

Think about every internet search you've completed in the last twenty-four hours. Maps, addresses, phone numbers, instructions, current events, even just what your friends are up too.

Like our internet, the people of Aratayo once relied on the Wireless for this information, and its sudden disappearance had a crippling effect on information sharing. Information is rare and precious, whether it's a technical manual for fixing pipes or just knowing whether your scavenger friends found anything good on their last run. The ability to broadcast information is all but gone, meaning the only way to find anything out, is if someone else tells you.



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Not only does this limit what information is available, it also limits the reliability and accuracy of the information that can be found. In the *Play Guide* it states that "for every person that survived, there was someone who hadn't". This is a great example of the sort of information that exists after the Shatter. It is anecdotal – no head counts were taken and no one really knows how many died but people presume based on their personal experiences and those presumptions combine to form a sort of vague history.

Its not necessary that the information players have be incorrect (indeed roughly half of the augmented did die in the Shatter) but the sense of a world built on supposition and uncertainty will come through if you avoid hard numbers and reliable information sources.

Body Horror Cybernetics

"What is that thing!?"

The scale of adoption in cybernetics would not have occurred if it was tantamount to replacing your arm with a crude metal claw covered in machine oil and rusted edges. Far from this – DNI based cybernetics were designed to look and feel as much like a flesh and blood limb as possible, including sensation feedback to the user. Cybernetics should be icons of the advanced world that was lost, clear technological marvels that would be universally desirable were it not for the Whisper.

Fortunately, the setting does also give you an opportunity to use the more confronting side of cybernetics should you wish. The Whisper has both a penchant for modifying its servants and a vested interest in keeping the survivors on edge. Most berserkers and suzerains should be unsettling because of their 'almost human' behaviours (and this works best if they look 'like us'), but you can occasionally mix this up. A suzerain doctor might have been driven by the Whisper to transform themselves into a horrible amalgam of surgical equipment and flesh. A particular group of painless might have been reassembled from corpses of dead soldiers combined with industrial machinery.

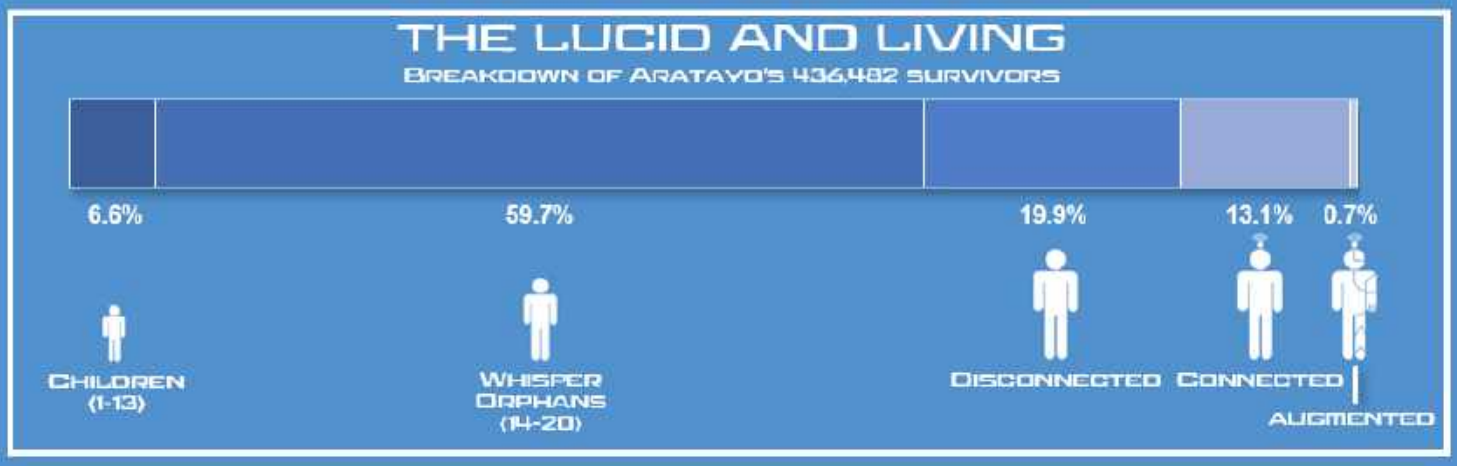
Inside the Zaibatsu

"If they were ignoring you it's because you spoke brashly. Rather than embarrass you by acknowledging your lack of calm they simply acted as though you were not present."

Members of the corporations and their ginbushi should come across extremely formal and should observe a level of politeness that would have been common before the Shatter but should seem out of place in the ruined world afterwards. Unlike the adaptive scavengers, the corporations have made every effort to preserve their behaviours and attitudes from before.

If you're familiar with Japanese culture, this is your opportunity to bring out your inner Otaku. Tatami mats, washi paper walls with koi fish decorations and speech interspaced with a few Japanese phrases will help make your corporations starkly separate from the common survivor. Perhaps even brush up on the etiquette practices of the Japanese samurai and feudal courts – the corporate executives should come across as a kind of neo-nobility around which the entire arcologies revolve.

We've established in several other places that the zaibatsu should be aloof from the problems of other survivors, but not 'evil for its own sake'. From within there should be undercurrents of fear, or at least uncertainty. Outwardly everyone maintains that the arcologies are perfectly safe but inwardly many cannot forget what happened to Raker Construction.



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STEP-BY-STEP CAMPAIGN BUILDING

Below we cover the steps to building an adventure and turning it into a full campaign. The rest of Part IV will discuss a real campaign and highlight how these steps were used.

Every game master will develop their own process, but this method will give you a solid starting point.

1. SET SOME LAMP-POSTS

When designing your campaign, you should start by picking out the key moments you want your campaign to touch on. Write yourself a few quick notes about them, detail isn't important at this point.

These lamp-posts aren't always about story either. Your group might be super excited to have a huge space battle, in which case a scrap between two space carriers in an asteroid field might be one of your lamp-posts. Many of your lamp-posts may also indicate objectives for your adventures. 'The players raid an Imperial armoury for weapons' implies a player objective to get better weaponry.

You don't need to evenly distribute lamp-post throughout your entire story, and you'll often find you have a lot more around the immediate future than you do for the end. Really you just need to have enough to know how to react to player actions that have consequences far beyond the session they happen in.

The curator of the arcology museum is the secret act-three villain, but the players might accidently push a bookcase onto him at the start. Having a rough picture of the story ahead will give you some idea of how important it is he survive versus how important it is that he keep the powers that can save him a secret. If you don't lamp-post, it's going to be too late when you realise, fifteen sessions later, that the curator would have been an amazing villain, if only he hadn't been crushed to death by that bookcase.

2. NOTES PASS

Once you have your lamp-posts, it's time to take a closer look at the next two or three sessions and make some more detailed notes. Who are the characters? What are the players' major objectives, and how do events continue if they succeed? Or if they fail?

Don't try to write out every detail, but make sure you have a clear path between the lamp-posts you placed earlier. Ensure any outstanding story problems have been solved.

If the players need to leave the planet in three sessions' time, your notes should tell you when and how you expect them to get a ship. Is there some other way for them to travel if they mess up acquiring that ship?

Good advice for this section is don't write anything you're not prepared to throw away. If you've written eight thousand words about an event three sessions from now – whether consciously or not – you'll find yourself trying to prevent the players from making any meaningful choice that might deviate from it.

3. SESSION WRITE UP

The session write-up is the collection of notes you'll take into the session itself. Exactly how much detail you need here varies from GM to GM, according to their talent (and inclination) towards improvising. It's best to only write up one session at a time, for your players' actions in the current session may change the next session so dramatically that all your hard work could go to waste.

The example session on p.155 shows a fairly thorough write-up, and if it's your first time GMing, a similar level of detail couldn't hurt. Just remember that, however complete your notes, don't be chained to them. Sooner or later, the players are going to take things in a direction you didn't plan for. That's great! Let it happen; facilitate it to the best of your ability and have fun with it. Your players would much rather stumble through with you, than be told 'no you can't because my notes don't cover that'.

4. OBSERVE TO INCLUDE

While you're playing your lovingly crafted session, keep an eye out for how to include the players in the future story. If a player is really compassionate, give them an opportunity to help someone from their backstory who's fallen on hard times. A player might make a big deal about their background as an orphan, so you can adjust a future session to take place in the orphanage. Some players just want to show off how badass their character is in a fight, so a future session might require a single player to enter a tournament of augmented horrors that even the best in the world were slain by.

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As a general rule avoid 'punishing' players for their backstory. Fiction is filled with examples of love interests and other friends and allies who exist only to be imperilled and provide villains with leverage over the heroes. Unfortunately, this has made players leery of building any real connection with any character that seems a potential risk.

Instead of giving the hero a sister they have to rescue, try giving them a sister who wants to help but knows they're useless in combat and so provides financial assistance. Instead of having to save their love interest from imprisonment, have them get called in to assist their love interest in starting a new settlement. Anything you can do to demonstrate you're not following the cliché will help your players feel safe to invest in their fictional allies.

Whatever your approach, you want to make every player at your table feel like at least one session was written with them in mind. Learn by watching the players, and use what you've learned when you update your lamp-posts and notes in the next steps.

5. ADAPT – LAMP-POSTS

Once you've run your session, it's time to see how the fun and chaos has affected your greater story. Most times, your lamp-posts won't require too much attention, though you might need to rethink how to connect them. You'll probably have some new ideas for lamp-posts, so add and alter as necessary. Some lamp-posts might not seem as exciting on balance (or in light of player actions) and can be dropped.

If your players have done something so drastic that most of the lamp-posts no longer work, the easiest way to fix them is to think like a villain. If the players struck a decisive blow, the opposition won't keep trucking along with a plan that's now defunct. What resources do they still have, and how can they get closer to their end goal?

On the other hand, if your party has failed a critical objective, the villain is now a step closer to her objectives, and the stakes are higher. Fortunately, the villain now assumes the players are defeated (or at least incompetent) and won't waste further resources trying to counter them. Remember, she might seem all-powerful from the players' perspective, but even she has only so many resources, and there's always demands for them elsewhere. Besides reducing defences, she may also forget to adapt. The same defence mechanism that stopped the players before, may be adopted at all her facilities, underestimating the heroes' ability to find and exploit a weakness.

6. ADAPT – NOTES PASS

The work you did in the notes pass may require a little more effort. The players may have ended the session in a very different circumstance from what you'd expected.

Inversely to the last step, the easiest way to get your immediate story back on track is to think like a hero: what's their objective right now, and what obstacle is stopping them from completing it? What do they need to overcome that obstacle?

Suppose you were expecting the players to receive an invitation to the arcology gala ball as a reward for recovering the defence field generator for the daimyō. Unfortunately, the generator was destroyed (or your particularly mercenary players sold it to someone else) so the reward was forfeit. The objective is still to get into the gala, and the obstacle is that the players aren't on the guest list anymore. With the problem framed, two solutions immediately stand out: sneak in, or steal passes and disguise themselves as other guests.

Wherever possible, try to give the heroes a means to fix any problem themselves. If they got imprisoned, try to have them escape on their own rather than getting help. It's okay to give the players allies who will come for them in a bind, just make sure that it doesn't feel like those allies exist just to repair plot problems.

CONTINUING THE CAMPAIGN

Now you've got enough details to do the write-up for next session. If you've made it this far, you can plan anything from two sessions to a lifetime of them, simply continue the cycle of write-up, play, include, adapt and write-up again.

Of course, no one wants to play a campaign that lasts forever, so one of your lamp-posts should mark the logical end of your campaign. When your campaign hits the end, come up with some epilogue with the players on how they spend their happily ever after, and take a moment to reminisce is on the grand adventure you've had.

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ENGINEERING GREATNESS

There have been volumes written on what makes a good story, and we couldn't begin to scratch the surface of that content here. Less common are resources on how to write *interactive* stories, and it can be quite different. Below are a few tips on making a great story, that still allows agency.

MAKE THE FRAME, NOT THE PAINTING

Unlike a conventional story, you can't write what the heroes will do; you can only create a space and circumstance for them to do it in. Don't try to manipulate them into heroic action or overshadow them with GM puppets. Put your energy into making a grand stage, and your players will give you a performance worthy of it. Don't bore them with a carefully scripted plot that gives them all the answers, instead draw them in with companions who need their guidance. Give them bold questions and circumstances where it's their answer that matters most, whether you personally consider it right or wrong.

ALLOW MEANINGFUL CHOICES

Players having to face a clear choice, often a moral one, can be a powerful moment. Which of your friends do you save? Who do you take with you in the last escape pod? Do you support a cruel settlement leader because he's been more successful against the Whisper?

You should always strive to make your players' choices meaningful through consequence. If they choose to save a particular character, then that character shouldn't disappear from the story thereafter. If they put a particular leader in charge of a settlement, that settlement should be relevant for sessions yet to come.

Also make sure your choice isn't so murky that the players might as well flip a coin. A strong choice should be difficult to make because of the foreseeable consequences, not because of a lack of information. Asking the players to choose a settlement leader between two figures they know nothing about is difficult, but not compelling. Worse still, players will feel like they're being set up to take responsibility for a bad decision.

The flipside to this is that the consequences, though known, shouldn't be so clearly 'this good, this bad' that no real decision is necessary. If one potential leader is an egomaniac who plans to keep the village warm by burning the children of other settlements, and the other is an empathic scientific genius with a design for a clean fusion reactor, there really is no choice necessary.

TRIAL AND ERROR CHARACTER PARADE

The most important thing a character can do – the only thing that ultimately matters – is to be engaging for the players. The player characters should find any recurring actor to be likeable, interesting, or even detestable (in fact, try not to make your cast too consistent, an ally you wish you didn't have to work with, or a villain you wish you didn't have to kill, can be a powerful element).

Hitting these bars can be more difficult than you think, and a lot of the tricks used in books and film won't work here. Many people liked Legolas in the Lord of the Rings movies because of his cocky attitude and amazing combat acrobatics, but this character will not go over well with a player group (see GM vanity pageant on p.3 for more).

The good news is that you get player feedback in real time, so you can keep switching up the cast until you figure out what sticks. This might sound like it would make for an erratic story, but you'd be surprised how much depth this kind of casting can actually add. Is your main villain unengaging? Introduce his trusted lieutenant who, if he's interesting enough, turns out to be the greater threat and maybe even the real mastermind.

If the players have to keep going back to a quest giver they find boring, introduce the quest giver's partner or secretary. This new character finds their boss every bit as boring as the players and conspires with the party to liven things up.

Sometimes the players will develop a sudden and unexpected attachment to a background extra. If this happens, use it! Have that character make a return appearance at a key moment, or even become a regular figure. Ultimately your players will show you what they find engaging, you just have to learn from their actions and be bold about adjusting future sessions.

MIX IT UP

Even the enjoyable becomes boring after a while. Your villain may have lots of space dreadnaughts, but if every battle is on or against one, the players will quickly lose interest.

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Instead, give your heroes opportunities to come at the villain sideways. They could hit a critical fuel facility on a tectonically active ice planet, or a shipyard hidden beneath the turquoise oceans of a paradise world. An admiral might be willing to defect if the heroes can extract her family from house arrest in their skyscraper penthouse.

Likewise, the villain should soon realise that the players can't be fought conventionally and instead of space cruisers, he might start sending out his own special forces: power-armoured marines, nimble hunter-killer drones, or cybernetical altered space monsters.

As with characters, not everything will resonate perfectly with your group, and you should try to incorporate things they enjoy as you learn them, but always keep mixing it up. Even if space dreadnaughts are their favourite thing, they're still not going to want every session to involve one. Save the things they really love for the big moments.

DON'T EXPECT THE VILLAIN TO ESCAPE

Recurring characters are a powerful tool in storytelling, and we encourage you to use them, just don't put them in front of the players directly. Players will risk great peril to gun down anyone who seems to be fleeing combat, and they will generally target leaders ahead of everyone else. Attempts to prevent them doing so, even to preserve what you believe is an amazing story, will generally be viewed as an unacceptable abuse of your GM powers.

Rather than having your villain take part in combat directly, have their hand shown indirectly. The players can come across orders signed by the villain or security footage of them at the scene not long before the players arrived. Science fiction offers plenty of means of communication (wireless VPNs, holograms, and just plain radio) that can allow the villain to communicate with the players without showing her face.

You can also engineer recurring villains the other way. Sometimes, by sheer luck of the dice, a lesser opponent might manage to escape (or the players may have to flee themselves). Bump up this character's abilities and have them return to give the players a second shot at them.

EXAMPLE CAMPAIGN

This chapter discusses a real-world example of putting a campaign into practice. Obviously, it would be infeasible (and of questionable value) to simply include all of the session notes, instead we look at the development of the characters and the first session in detail, and the changes that came out of it. In the later part of this chapter we explore moments of truth in the campaign, key movements that call on many of the principles described previous.

It warrants mentioning that this campaign played out over twelve months, so the game has evolved significantly since that test began, though the spirit remains the same.

THE PLAYERS

If you've read the *Play Guide*, then you have already encountered some of the player characters of this adventure; but unlike the example in the *Play Guide*, this was the group's first time playing *Wireless Soul Transmission*, so the characters were as new to them as they were to the GM. What follows gives the GM's initial impressions and touches on the discussions they had around character creation.

Cas: playing Meiliir, a Tencom ginbushi

I've known Cas for a long time, and in other RPGs she has a history of playing backstabby rogues, but unlike some rogues, she's a strong team player. I wasn't surprised to see her play a ginbushi – they being the stabbiest class – but I did have some concerns because the ginbushi are very focused on honour. Stabbing certainly, but not normally in the back. I discussed this with her at the outset, and she seemed comfortable pushing her boundaries.

Had she been more fixated on the stealth component, I might have created a custom origin for her that had the *stealth* skill (These days I'd have pointed her at the Yuki-onna clan, but they weren't in the build we played) or nudged her in the direction of the network ghost.

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Belle: playing an unnamed (modified) Woodsman disconnected

Belle is a very upbeat player who can come up with a wild solution to a simple technical problem, and then minutes later vastly simplify a complex problem ('why don't we try knocking on the door?'). She's usually pretty good at getting along with other players, but I must admit I panicked a little when she told me she was playing a character who wouldn't reveal their name, appearance, or any other detail, even to the party. Character designs that have that meta level to them, such as keeping secrets from the party, are definitely a warning sign.

On discussion I discovered that she herself didn't have those details, the character's identity was a doomsday prepper and he/she/it was paranoid about the 'gubberment' stealing their thoughts through the wireless, hence never being connected. This was actually a super cool idea for the setting and, critically, the player's idea was about the lack of personal identifiers, not the joy of obscuring them from the party. The party ultimately nicknamed this character 'shotgun citizen'.

Seri: playing Bolts'n'Bones, an Experimental augmented

Seri's characters often develop around a few central ideas that are triggered by some random event in the campaign (such as a disturbing pride in collecting diseases after managing to pick up two in short order). He also is a skilled deck builder in table-top card games, and that skill with numbers meant his characters were always strong, though often in an unconventional or unexpected way.

Initially I couldn't get much of a read on his character, or what he hoped to get from the game, but as should be clear from the above, I knew that would developed with time. I also knew that his character build would be solid in a mechanical sense.

On a closing note – the Experimental can fly, which is rad. When I found this out, I didn't change the first session, or any session really. Urban environments have a natural verticality to them, so I figured there would be times when it was a great help, and times when it wasn't. Trying to mess with that, to control when it was applicable, would inevitably make me oppose the player in a contrived way.

James: playing Surge Protector, a (modified) Saviour en Route system guardian

James is great to have at any table, he gets on well with almost everyone and has a subtle but sure way of reminding everyone of their objective when the group is getting a little sidetracked. The Surge Protector did give me some initial pause, however; he was a TV superhero sponsored by the Stratum Electric Power Company turned real world superhero. It was a really interesting concept, but I wasn't sure how it would go with the cyberpunk digital apocalypse – it seemed a little too anime. However, we made these characters as a group, and everyone seemed excited by the idea, so I put my apprehension aside.

What would I have done if the group hadn't approved has no single answer, there needs to be a balance between the group and the individual so that neither ruins the others fun. However you cut it though, in a long-term campaign, you need to resolve this issue before the characters hit the street. At this point they're just theoretical, but every second Surge Protector spends walking around the universe, it's that much more unreasonable to expect the player to change him.

Toby: playing Chubsthaniel 'Chubs' McGuiness, a Private Agent network ghost

Toby is an agent of Chaos, not necessarily violence, but certainly disruption. He will try to upset allied NPCs, or befriend enemies, or steal things he doesn't need from people whom the party can't afford to alienate. Toby is not to be GMed by the faint of heart, but he is also absolutely hilarious. His way of expressing his mischief livens the session up for everyone and can turn a mundane encounter into the most memorable part of the session. But he can go too far, and the trick is knowing when to start reeling him in. My groups have an understanding that, if you say something that crosses a line, such as declaring that you pickpocket another player, I'll just pretend you didn't say it, and play will continue. Sometimes I do this too early, sometimes too late, but everyone understands that it's to keep on table mischief turning into real world angst.

For his part, Toby was playing a Private Detective, and a fairly inept, somewhat sleazy one at that. I don't remember if *Fallout 4* was out yet, but I remember asking myself how likely this profession was after a digital apocalypse and ultimately deciding that there'd be enough missing people after the Shatter that there'd definitely be work for someone who

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could track them down, and certainly film noir and cyberpunk have enough in common that a 'private dick' would fit the theme. So much so that, after the test, the Private Agent origin was added to the class list.

Because this origin didn't exist at the time, I gave him a heavy pistol, for that nice old-school revolver feel, the *six second lie* talent which I knew Toby would use to great hilarity, and more or less the same skills, AP, and yen as the other network ghost origins.

Bringing the Party Together

I've found that the more complicated your binding premise, the more likely a player is to build it into their character in a way that inevitably creates opposition in the party. Taking from that I told the players just once sentence, "You've all been working together for months as Eddings Park's elite trouble-shooter team – jobs the others can't do fall to you."

It's not an inspiring binding statement, but as I mentioned, that was the objective. The players took it as given and we moved on.

GINBUSHI LEADERSHIP PRIMER II

DAIMYŌ

Daimyō (commonly translated as 'lord') is a title given to corporate executives such as yourself to indicate their right to command that corporations ginbushi. Some corporations invest this power in just one or two figures, while others award this power to every major stockholder and manager.

Though not all daimyō are aware of it, their rank among equals is critical. A respected daimyō's orders will be followed immediately and to the letter. One who is believed less worthy will find their intentions carried out, but in a manner and timeframe the ginbushi think appropriate.

HOUSE FATHER/MOTHER

Aspirants who join a ginbushi clan are legally adopted into the clan leaders family. In this way the House Father, or Mother, is a literal term as well as a metaphorical one. The House Master is expected to embody the clan, the parent zaibatsu's principles, and the tenets of bushidō. His or her role is to advise the corporate director(s) on security, appoint masters, and determine house policy.

Because they must be seen as infallible, you will find a house master rarely provides direct orders on strategy. Instead he or she will demonstrate subtle approval for a subordinates plan. If the plan goes awry, it was the subordinate misinterpreting the so-called 'will of the House'.

ANVETECH-0

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THE FIRST CAMPAIGN CYCLE

Below the GM will walk you through a full development cycle for the first session – from initial lamp-posting, through the complete session write-up, and into the updates to the lamp-posts and notes that followed.

LAMP-POSTS

The lamp-posts I first created were:

1) Players learn about the world / status quo. (arc I)

2) Players discover the first Orikasa Fragment, kicking off a search for more and learning about the cause of the Whisper along the way. (arc II)

3) The players, plus Orikasa, now work together to defeat the Whisper. (arc III)

4) At least one demonstration of the Whisper's ability to 'hack' someone who isn't connected.

5) John De Lancie chiding humanity for its reach exceeding its grasp.

6) At least one detective case.

7) Meet Meiliir's teacher/master.

8) Shotgun Citizen should be a major figure in Eddings Park.

9) We should visit the DNR facility where Bolts'n'Bones was to work.

10) Something to do with Surge Protector.

Note that there's three kinds of lamp-posts here:

Plot lamp-posts (1–3)

The first three markers broadly outline the story I want to tell. Of all of the lamp-posts, these are the only ones that depend on one another. I find the more tightly my lamp-posts are linked, the harder it is to adapt when something goes wrong.

Also note that, other than the defeat of the Whisper, I have no clear picture for how this story is going to end, and it's way too early to try and assume what the end will look like.

Cool idea lamp-posts (4–5)

These are elements that I want to include but which may not be intrinsically tied to the plot. From the moment I first started thinking about people with implants being hacked, I became intrigued with the idea of surprising the players with a disconnected sleeper agent. I thought it would be a great way to demonstrate that the Whisper could change the rules at any time.

As for the bit about John De Lancie (that's the actor who plays Q in *Star Trek* by the way), this was actually a player request. There's a recurring gag in our group where John De Lancie chiding humanity is always provided as an option in any multiple-choice question, and I'd foolishly provided a multiple-choice question on *Facebook* about what elements of the setting the group would like to see focused on. Cyberpunk, aliens, and space travel were up-voted, but De Lancie was inevitably the most popular option.

Fortunately, this setting already had the Patron, so I had an easy answer for what my group thought was a difficult question. I just had to wait for the right moment.

Player lamp-posts (5–10)

These are critical, if you don't plan to include your players, then you plan to exclude them. Note that this early I had very little in the way of fixed plans, just some likely trigger points. Using Meiliir as an example, I hadn't seen this character played yet, so I had no idea how to make a meeting with her Master interesting, but considering she was sent into danger while all her fellow ginbushi stayed in the arcology, there had to be something there worth exploring.

I'd also flag at this point that I had no idea what to do with Surge Protector, somehow the fallen comrade aspect of the Saviour en Route origin didn't seem to apply but I didn't have a clue what might. I was confident enough to assume I'd figure something out, but I left this point in my notes so that it would remind me to watch for opportunities.

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SHORT NOTES

The short notes I prepared before the first session were as follows:

Session 1

1) Players go in to rescue a team of other scavengers from Eddings Park.

2) The scavengers were trying to raid a DNR facility for a gravity manipulator augment.

3) There should be a strong berserker who appears to be the boss. The actual boss is the augment the scavengers came for, still in its containment cell.

4) Broken skylight, water pouring into a pool in a first-floor garden.

5) On their way to the facility, the players should come across a skittish augmented loner, but he won't start a fight if they don't.

Session 2

6) Return to Eddings Park, meet the locals. Players should be respected here and have their own homes.

7) Resolve the rescue. Congratulations for saving the team and perhaps some examination of the destroyed augmentation/boss from the facility.

8) Chubs gets his first case – should be delivered by a femme fatale and involve an elaborate double-play.

9) The village master gives the players a new quest necessary to preserve a critical resource (Medicine? Electricity? Water? New Sat-Blanket?)

Session 3

10) A resistance faction asks to operate out of the players' village.

11) The players should resolve Chubs' detective case, ideally this should happen at a site where the party is going anyway.

When I first write these, I don't worry about sessions, only once I have my list do I go back and draw in lines where I think the session breaks will end up. I also make my notes in the order things come to me, not the chronological order, so you'll note that point 5 will come at the start of session 1, not the end. Sometimes this means I need to rearrange things before putting in the session breaks.

Now let's look at my short notes in a little more detail.

Session 1: Milk Run

Since I wanted to show the status quo, I originally thought I would have the players start as scavengers and that it would be their foray into the facility that had gone badly wrong. After chewing on this idea for a bit, I decided not to; my players tend to take everything that's not nailed down as it is (once, when confronted by a gorgeous jade stone cobbled road, they literally pried up the street to sell). So, I decided that instead of their first mission being a money-making venture, it would establish them as the village cavalry – a force of respected experts who tackle challenges too great for the average survivor. As a happy side-effect, it gave me an opportunity to demonstrate both the dangers of the scavenger's life and the tight-knit nature of the survivors.

The decision to set it in the DNR facility was a speculative pass at linking Bolts'n'Bones into the story. I was already playing around with the idea of having a second test subject out there, so I didn't mind burning the character lamp-post for this player straight away. If Seri really went hunting in the facility for answers, then I'd know he was very committed to this element of his origin. If he treated it no differently to the other players, I could keep experimenting until I found something that resonated with him.

The encounter with an augmented on the way to the facility was a late addition, but I felt it was important. It was a four versus one encounter, favouring the party, and not predisposed to ending in violence. Whether or not the players pushed it in that direction would tell me a lot about how the players would approach problems in this setting. In the meantime, it would give them a chance to learn some of the rules when lives (at least their own) weren't really at risk and to see how most augmented are forced to live, since villages won't accept them.

Session 2: Return to Eddings Park

Originally, I'd envisioned the return to Eddings Park as being part of the epilogue of Session 1, but I realised quickly that would be impractical for two reasons. First, seeing how a settlement might work would require more than one sentence at the end of a session, and showing that was a big component of my intended first arc. And second, to show off a

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settlement would involve introducing a ton of cast and set pieces, and I felt I would never get that done in time for Session 1.

So Eddings Park would be the focal point of Session 2, closing out the outcome of the first mission and the sending the players on a new mission critical to the survival of their home base. If Session 1 was about scavenging pre-Shatter facilities, then Session 2 would be about post-Shatter communities and how they endure.

I also thought this would be a perfect time to introduce a 'case' for Chubs McGuiness. I had a feeling that such a thing could be a fun side quest for the whole party, so I wanted to try the form early. If it was a success, these side jobs could then become a regular thing. At this point, I didn't know exactly what the side case would be, but I figured I could dig up a classic film noir plot and adjust it to my purposes. If James Cameron can turn *Pocahontas* into *Avatar*, surely, I could turn the *Maltese Falcon* into *Blade Runner*.

Session 3: The Resistance Emerges

Obviously, this far out, my notes become pretty sparse, but I knew I wanted to introduce the resistance, a group that still fight against the Whisper's agents. I knew they were a contentious bunch and that joining with them would change the tone from odd-job mercenaries to active opponents of the Whisper. For those reasons, I intended to give the players a clear opportunity to side with, or not side with, that faction.

SESSION WRITE UP

The next chapter is an adapted version of the session write-up for the first session. This version has slightly more detail than the original, and no references to specific players so that it can be used as an opening session for your own campaigns.

This session has a pretty low degree of difficulty, which is recommended for a players who are just learning the ropes.

Following the example, we'll return to the GM to talk about how this session went and how it affected the planned lamp-posts and notes.

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SESSION 1

OBLIGATORY FILM NOIR INTRO

The scene is a deserted street, scattered with dead vehicles abandoned by their dead owners and cast eternally in deep shadows by the dark concrete towers that loom over it, standing shoulder to shoulder like gawkers at a murder scene. The pouring rain flows in the streets; the gutters are blocked, but no one's come by to clean them in half a decade. Amid the broken glass, rotting paper, and things too disgusting to further investigate is the occasional glitter of spent shell casings that raft through floodwater, fleeing some long-ago last stand.

To this scene add five adventurers, untested companions who hug their coats tightly as they move quickly down the street towards a four-storey building bearing the name Denim Neural Robotics. They carry weapons, but it seems to give them little confidence as they scan the side alleys, the shadows, and not infrequently, the skies. They are armed like hunters, but in the open they move like field mice when there are much larger predators about.

Spot/listen checks, opposed by Kramer's +2 *stealth*, to spot the glint of the cyborg's artificial arm. He's crouched behind a shattered window in the second floor of a building part way down the street.

If the players don't spot him, Kramer will aim his auto pistol on the nearest and call out as noted below.

This scene tends to play out in one of two ways. Sometimes the players immediately go into combat mode and attack Kramer, in which case he will flee or, if cornered, defend himself.

Other times he will spot them first, or the players will approach openly. His primary opening is always 'who are you, what are you doing here?'

Why *are* we here?

Kramer's question (assuming he gets to ask it) segues nicely into explaining to the players what their mission is:

You're here on behalf of the master of your home settlement of Eddings Park. Scavengers from the settlements frequently go after specific pieces of technology which they trade to the corporate arcologies for food and medicine.

One such group of scavengers from Eddings Park went out to Denim Neural Robotics early this morning but have not returned. They were a fairly green group, and it was a previously unexplored site, so Master Ren wants you to find any survivors and bring them back. He urges caution as no one will come after you if you do not return.

The players don't need to tell Kramer the truth, in point of fact, they don't have to tell him anything, so long as they proceed down the street and don't try to enter the building he's in.

This scene should give the players a taste of the distrust between augmented (in many cases they will be sending more distrust at Kramer than he is at them). It's also an interesting litmus test of how gung-ho your player group are.

Kramer is resting in one of his safe houses when the players arrive, which is why he's so defensive.

He saw the group the players are going to rescue head further up the road, but he hasn't seen them come back.

As an augmented Kramer is a mercenary by necessity and might actually accompany the players if they can make a worthwhile offer.

Favoured Virtue: Genuine

Favoured Vice: Slave to the Beat

Concluding the Scene

The scene is concluded once the players have determined that they can safely proceed down the street.

If everything went peacefully, simply announce that the party continues on to their destination.

If a firearm was discharged use the following:

As you move through the area you hear the scuffing of many feet. It could be lots of things, it could be nothing, but most likely, it's berserkers attracted by the gunshot(s).

With a final glance around, you pick up the pace, cutting through buildings and across rooftops to break line of sight and put as much distance as possible between you and the street.

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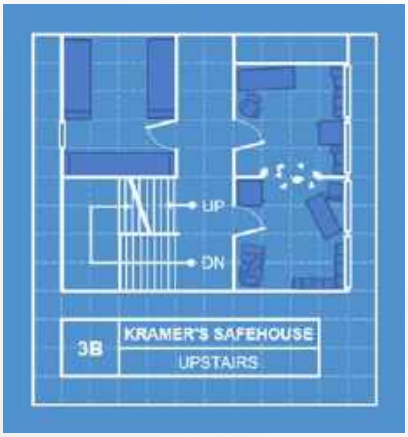

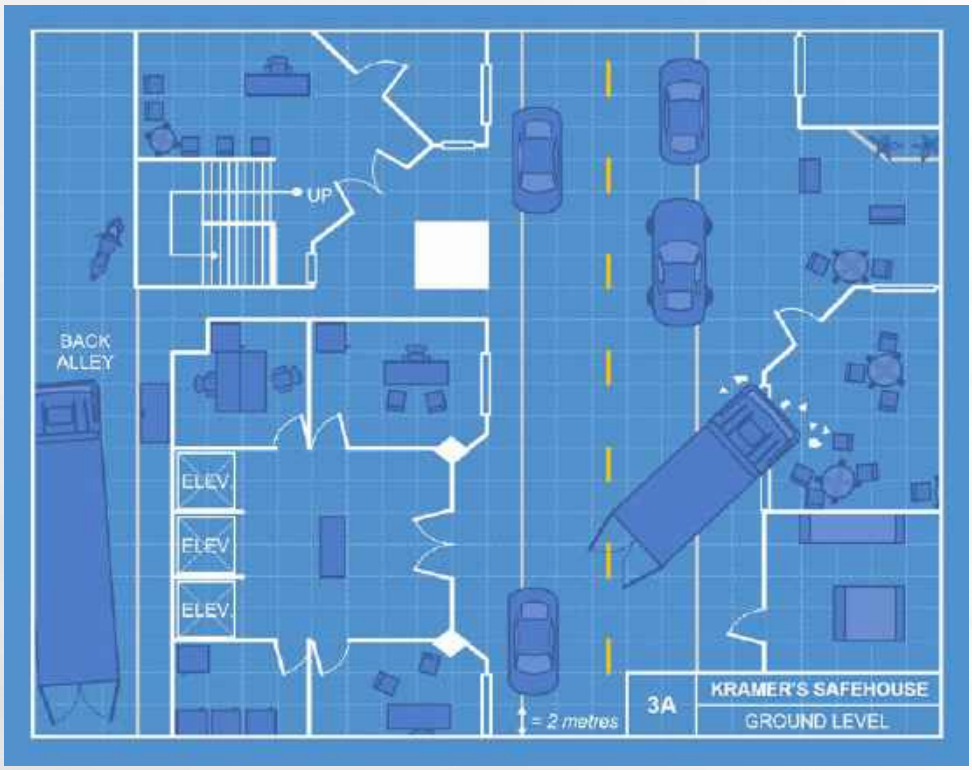

Kramer – Stats

Movement: 4 Dash, 8 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +1, Unskilled +0

Skilled (+2) in *athletics, stealth, medical*

DEFENCES

Cover 17	Evade 10	Base 5
	IC 8	

Armour: Fibreweave vest – Fibreweave torso & fibreweave arm protection from augmentation.

Wounds Tolerance: 0

Tactics and Gear

Kramer doesn't want to fight since he's outnumbered by the players, but he's concerned their intent is to rob his safe house. If a fight does break out, he'll grab his trauma kit and run through the back of the house to escape.

Equipment: Tradable tech worth ¥5,000 (a portable music player) and a trauma kit. A spot/listen [18] check to search his safe house will find a further ¥30,000 worth of tradable items.

Augmentation: Hercules arm with impact-resistant polymers

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +3	*Aim* +4	*Recoil* +2	*Melee* +2

WEAPON ATTACKS

Auto Pistol

Range: Medium		AP: Fibreweave	
Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Shot Through
[1]	[2–4]	[5]	[6]
Burst			

Unarmed

Range: Melee		AP: Padding	
Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1-3]	[4-5]	[6]	

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DENIM NEURAL ROBOTICS MAIN ENTRANCE

DNR's building is a dwarf in a city of giants. Four storeys tall, it is surrounded on three sides by much taller office towers and a burnt-out parking structure twice its height glares it down from across the road. As you approach the DNR building, you step across the fire suppression bots that lay like corpses in the street, their presence suggesting perhaps this fire somehow fought back.

There's a large sliding glass door that serves as the main entrance to Denim Neural Robotics, and it glides open automatically as you approach. Unfortunately, immediately behind it are heavy steel shutters that descended in response to some long-ago emergency.

If there's anyone in the party with the augmented Experimental origin, they'll recognise this as the facility they were hired to work at. They may make a *preparation* [10] check to see if they kept the passcodes for the door.

Defeat Security [10] check to unlock the security door.

Behind the security door is a pile of corpses and an autogun deployed from the ceiling. It immediately attacks.

THE OTHER WAY IN

Canny players will recognise that it's unlikely that the people they're looking for went in through an armoured door and an autogun. Any player who asks to investigate the building gets the following (no check needed)

Against the side wall of the DNR building is an emergency response arvie five metres tall and as still as a statue. You notice there are no shutters on the second floor of the building and that someone has run some boards from the shoulder of the arvie to a shattered second-floor window.

Make a +10 attack versus each of your augmented players' IC defence. This actually relates to an illusion further into the building, but by making the roll now, you prevent the players from guessing the reason (if anything it will make them leery about climbing the arvie, and so they should be).

INSIDE THE BUILDING

The following notes cover the floors in the most likely order the players will approach them. Obviously, if they come at it differently, they'll get a different result.

The stairs are the sensible transition between the floors as the lifts are held on the ground floor by the lockdown. There are rungs in the elevator shaft but it's a *force* [15] check to pry the lift door (10 if you use something to lever it)

The roof over the stairs to the ground floor has collapsed, blocking the stairwell to that floor. This is the illusion you rolled for above, be sure to get those who've succeeded to decide their actions first before revealing the truth to those who succeeded.

AUTOGUN (VEHICLE) - STATS

Mechanical Tolerance: 2

DEFENCES

Cover 5	Evade 5	Base 5
	IC 10	

Primary Armour: ceramic
Damage Threshold: LAV
Annihilation Threshold: Blast
Small: *Don't roll hit location, any hit over damage threshold will destroy this vehicle.*

Weakness - Targeting Sensor
Difficulty / skill: *Engineering* or *Warcraft [10]*
Vulnerable to: all weapons
Impact: The weapon can no longer track targets and idles in search mode.

Description:
A small calibre weapon hangs from the ceiling in a swivel mount.

WEAPONS

Light autogun			
Range: Medium		AP: Fibreweave	
Nicked [1]	Punctured [2-4]	Pierced Deeply [5]	Shot Through [6]
Autofire – Rolls of 10 or higher trigger an additional shot. Shots must be evenly distributed across targets beneath autofire template.			

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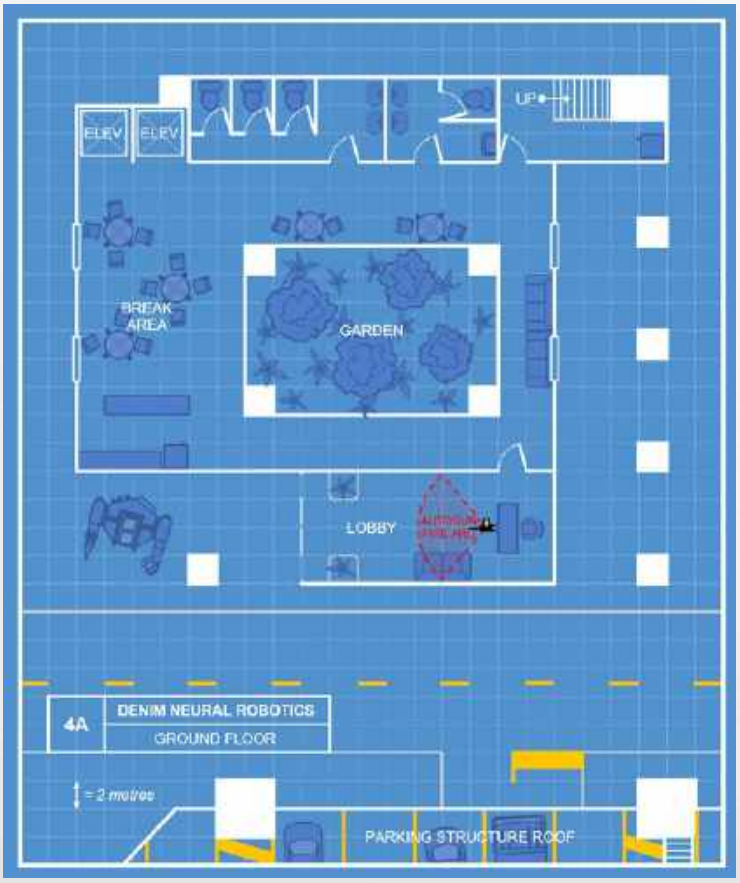

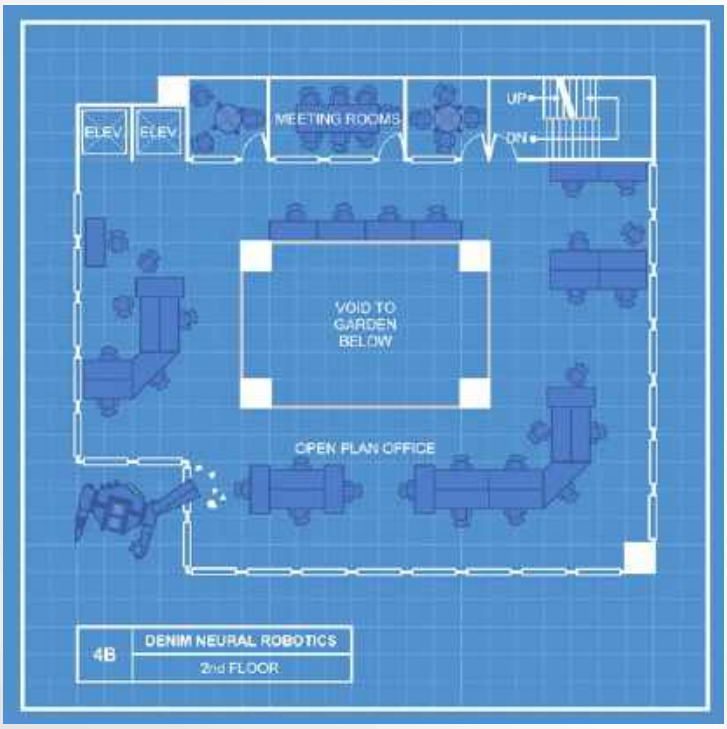

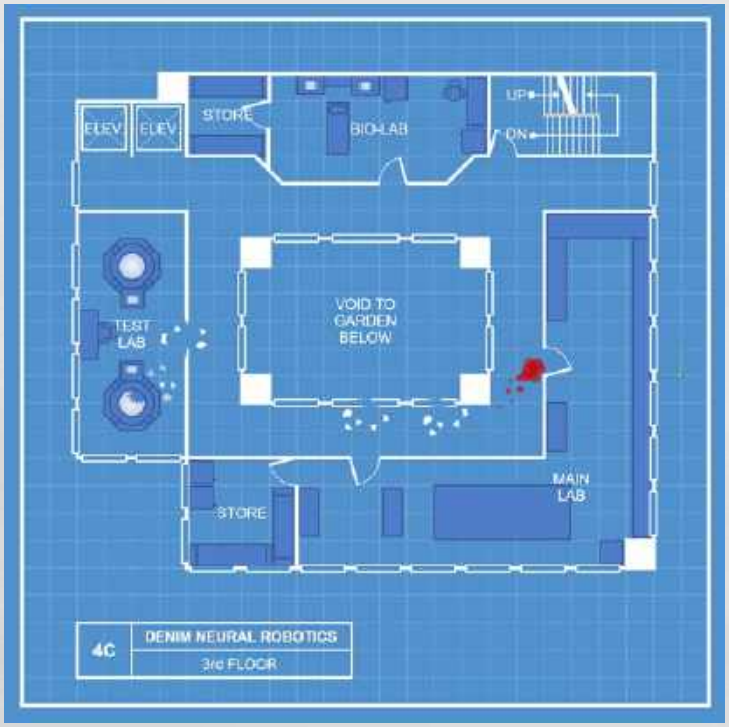

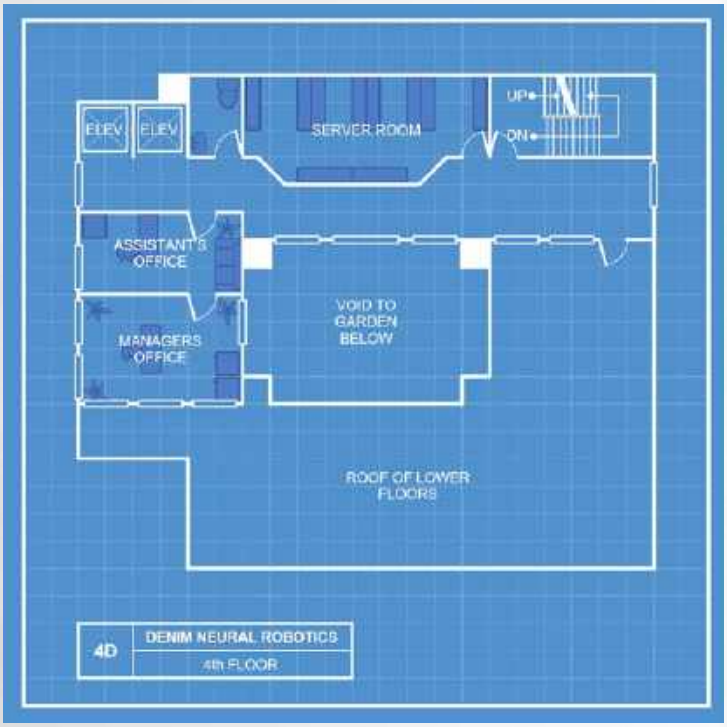

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THE SECOND FLOOR

This floor appears to be a large open-plan office, checkered lighting provided by the remaining overheads show pasty vacant faces sitting at computers, their hands meaninglessly typing on keyboards, some at computers that aren't even working. The mindless clicking of a dozen keyboards provides a counter rhythm to the drum of the rain on the windows in a room that is otherwise deathly silent.

The floor is constructed like a mezzanine, in the central void you can see several trees growing up from the floor below and rain pouring down to meet them from a broken skylight. There are a few meeting rooms along one wall and ending on one side with a stairwell and on the other with a pair of lifts.

The subjects at the computers are all lost. Unless the players attack, they'll just keep doing what they're doing.

There's nothing of real value here. If a player asks to investigate one of the computers, you can give them the *S0101 – Level 2* handout.

If the players want to ransack the floor, they find functional computer parts worth ¥20,000

THE THIRD FLOOR

Coming up the stairs there's a sign just across from you that says 'Level 3 – Labs'. This floor is a closed plan, but a central corridor runs around the void space in the middle, unlike the floors below windows separate you from the view below. Several of the panes are shattered, and you see bullet casings on the floor, petering off towards a pool of blood and torn carpet. Smears of fresh blood describe a trail from there towards a large room on the east side of the building

THE MAIN LAB

The door to the main lab isn't locked, but it is barricaded and being held shut by one of the survivors.

Opposed *force* check versus Arthur's +1 modifier to open the door. On success, describe the player smashing the door open with a level of drama appropriate to how much the player won by.

This is really just an opportunity for any high-strength augmented in the party to flex their muscles. If the heroes fail, the survivors should call out with a 'who's there?". Because the lost don't speak, any response from the players is enough to receive a relieved welcome.

These are the three scavengers you're looking for, and their plight is immediately evident. One of them is unconscious on the floor, blood welling out of a stump where broken fragments of her former cybernetic leg are twisted into the flesh. One of the other survivors is trying to hold a tourniquet in place, but it's clearly not staunched the bleeding.

Saving Keiko

Keiko is in critical condition, and once they've opened the door, it will take quick action to save her.

The players must stitch her up with a *medical* [effort 40] check before a *luck* [effort 30] check (rolled every round by the GM) indicates she's bled out. If a player suggests it, they can add 10 to her *luck* check difficulty by administering a blood pack from either a trauma kit or by finding one in the bio-lab.

Even once 'healed' Keiko will still be unconscious, and the players will have to see her carried out.

Salvage

The players can salvage some ¥10,000 of useful equipment from the lab. There's a functional computer on which they'll find the *S0102 – Lab Computer* handout.

Questions

The players will doubtlessly have some questions for the survivors. Generally, Arthur will respond (Keiko's unconscious, and Scott is not talkative at the best of times). Here are the most obvious inquiries:

<u>What happened here?</u>

"We got in sure enough, and if we weren't in sight of the damn arm when a fucking collector came at us," he shakes his head in disbelief. "If you see it just run, bullets do nothing and… so we ran. It got Keiko and… when it was finished we brought her back here. We saw it go downstairs, and we haven't been game to try and leave since."

<u>What did you come for?</u>

"There's a cybernetic arm, prototype technology or something, I don't know. Some corporate was offering a million yen to get it, and suddenly I see why. It's just over in the test lab opposite."

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Eddings Park Survivors – Stats

Movement: 4 Dash, 8 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +1, Unskilled +0

Skilled (+2) in *stealth, defeat security, urbcraft*

DEFENCES

Cover 15	Evade 10	Base 5
	IC 8 (Keiko)	

Armour: Rugged Clothing– full body padding

Wounds Tolerance: 0

Tactics and Gear

The B team – Most are barely adults, but they carry weapons like they've used them their whole lives, which is probably close to the truth considering. They are:

Keiko, the injured augmented.

Arthur, the one who was holding the door.

Scott, the one attempting to provide medical attention

Equipment: A few pieces of salvage grabbed before everything went wrong – worth ¥10,000. Scott has an auto pistol, Arthur carries his heavy pistol and Keiko's SMG.

Augmentation: Having lost her leg, Keiko now has only a DNI.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +3	*Aim* +4	*Recoil* +2	*Melee* +2

WEAPON ATTACKS

Auto Pistol			
Range: Medium		AP: Fibreweave	
Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Shot Through
[1]	[2–4]	[5]	[6]
Burst			

Heavy Pistol			
Range: Medium		AP: Ceramic	
Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2-3]	[4-5]	[6]
Two-handed			

Submachine gun			
Range: Medium		AP: Ceramic	
Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Shot Through
[1]	[2–4]	[5]	[6]
Burst, autofire, two-handed, +1d6 to snap instead of aim			

Two of the three scavengers are Whisper orphans who are only just now old enough to start scavenging. They hoped to make a big debut by completing a valuable mission. Keiko was supposed to be their chaperone, but after a run of successful missions, she'd gotten complacent and believed they could pull this off.

Arthur's first priority is getting Keiko and Scott back alive, but he's also dreading returning home with a wounded (or dead) veteran and nothing to show for it. Scott is mostly just overwhelmed at this point. He's not catatonic, but he also doesn't want to be responsible for deciding the group's next move in case things get worse.

Favoured Virtue: Assertive or Courageous

Favoured Vice: Gullible

THE BIO-LAB

A bunch of CAUTION WET FLOOR signs have been placed around the door to the bio-lab, and someone's used a lot of tape to put a sign on the door that reads 'DO NOT OPEN UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCE'. From within, you can hear vague murmurings, but they don't sound like actual words.

Make a +15 attack versus their IC defence if a player asks to listen at the door. If the attack succeeds, they recognise the Whisper in the murmurings just before it slips through their firewalls. The next thing they know, they've popped the lock on the door and pulled it open.

Nearby players may make opposed force checks to hold the player back until the compulsion passes (about 1 round)

If they open it

The bio-lab has been completely destroyed, a kind of destruction so chaotic and complete that it defies any rational purpose. There are human remains scattered around the room, possibly just the one body, but it's been cut, bashed, chewed on, and clawed enough to kill a dozen men.

Standing at the centre of all this is a woman in a blood-stained business suit with expensive looking augmentation that frets about while her human half seems to hang off it like a used rag. Her cybernetic eye focuses on you first. Then her bloodshot human one catches up and she screams, "WHERE'S MY ARM, ANDREW?" She lunges at you.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

Carmen Light – Stats

Movement: 6 Dash, 12 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +1, Unskilled +0

Skilled (+3) in *Force*

DEFENCES

Cover 17	Evade 13	Base 5
	IC 12	

Armour: Eyes, arms and legs count as padded due to augmentations.

Wounds Tolerance: 0 (Painless)
Painless: Painless don't have a wounds tolerance, but they do not feel pain, will not bleed out, and cannot go into shock. They can only be killed through a critical or maiming wound to one of the following locations: Head, eyes, heart, lungs, sternum, armpit or kidneys.
As GM, you should note that significant injury to other location should still impact their ability to fight. Easy to slow, difficult to stop.

Tactics and Gear
Carmen is an unusually fast version of the painless berserker. She will attack the nearest player relentlessly and without regard for her personal safety.

Equipment: Jewellery worth ¥30,000

Augmentation: Hercules arm, runner's lungs, cosmetic eye (effects iris colour change).

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +1	*Aim* +1	*Recoil* +1	*Melee* +1

WEAPON ATTACKS

Surgical Blades

Range: Melee		AP: Fibreweave	
Grazed	Lacerated	Crippled	Cleaved
[1-2]	[3-4]	[5-6]	

Dual wielding – on a natural 10 or more roll a second attack

Unarmed

Range: Melee		AP: Padding	
Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1-3]	[4-5]	[6]	

Salvage
Carmen has destroyed almost everything of value in both the bio-lab and the adjoining store room.

If the players need it for Keiko, there is a single trauma kit in the room.

THE TEST LAB

The door to the test lab was once locked, but it has been smashed open by something large, so large the threshold was bent back to accommodate its passage.

Within you can see a test capsule with a bright yellow proto-type cyber-arm. There is a second test capsule that has been crudely smashed open, and its contents are gone. AR icons for wireless controls indicate various test routines that can be run on the capsules, including heat, cold, radiation, and impact tests.

It's playing dead, but the arm is a suzerain without a host.

Opening the capsule involves two steps, both must be performed by a character with a DNI:

1) The players must enable the safeties to prevent any of the test routines from activating while the pod is open.

2) A *defeat security* [effort 15] check must be made to defeat the password.

A character *could* try to smash the safety glass, but it's equivalent to steel versus weapons and would require a *force* [25] check to break.

A *spot/listen* [15] check when a player actually reaches in to take the item. On success, they realise that as they approach the arm they're hearing quiet susurrations over the wireless. On failure, they grab the arm.

If an augmented character does take the suzerain arm, it will immediately attempt to seize control of them with its *puppeteer* talent.

If a disconnected attempts to take the arm, they'll get a *react* [12] check to pull their own arm free of the capsule when they see the test safeties disengage. A moment later fire will burst into the capsule area.

The character's hand is *charred* by the fire test. They may reduce this to *burned* if they still have wounds tolerance.

William Kwan (Quiet) 36187234

DNR Gravity Manipulator Arm – STATS

Movement: 5 Dash, 10 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +3, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+5) in *resist, computer use*

DEFENCES

Cover 17	Evade 13	Base 8
	IC 14	

Armour: Padding (equivalent, actually plastic)

Wounds Tolerance: 3

Special Hit locations: *As a dismembered limb, roll 1d6 to determine hit locations. Compare to the below list.*

1 *Hand (movement)*
2 *Wrist*
3 *Forearm*
4 *Elbow*
5 *Upper arm*
6 *Shoulder*

Self-Repair: As a suzerain augmentation, the arm can self-repair, each round it will repair one wound. If it suffers more wounds than it has tolerance it becomes inert, but it will still repair very gradually (one wound per week until it can reactivate).

If the suzerain arm is hit by a blast weapon with an AP of at least padding it is completely destroyed and cannot repair.

Tactics and Gear

The suzerain is programmed to prevent anyone from locating the second DNR arm carried by the collector on the ground floor.

If it is in danger of being defeated, it will flee the building, both so it can be supported by berserkers from the call the horde talent and also so it can draw the heroes away from the ground floor.

Some groups of heroes may elect to retreat (their mission was only to save the scavenger team after all) and the suzerain is quite willing to let them go.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap -	*Aim* -	*Recoil* -	*Melee* +3

WEAPON ATTACKS

Unarmed

Range: Melee AP: Padding

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1-3]	[4-5]	[6]	

Figment

Simple action, +5 vs IC

While most figments are created by the Whisper, many suzerains also have the capacity to make illusory changes to their surroundings. Generally, this will be on a smaller scale than those engineered by the ambient Whisper. Common tricks include making doorways appear blocked, creating decoy opponents, and creating noises that suggest large scale reinforcements are arriving in the next couple of rounds.

This talent is the source of the illusionary cave in of the stairs between the ground floor and second level.

Scorpion Round

Simple action, +5 vs IC

The target believes that, somehow, their weapon's current magazine/power cell has a deadly scorpion on it. They know for certain that if they fire, they will be stung.

On their following turn, the player must either drop the weapon or make a *resist* [10] check to calmly reload the weapon. On success, they discard two munitions tokens.

On failure, they believe they are stung and drop the weapon. For the next five rounds, they must make an *endurance* [15] check each round or suffer a point of mental trauma as they believe the poison is coursing through their body.

Puppeteer

Simple action, +5 vs IC

The target is now controlled completely by the suzerain and must carry out its instructions to the best of their ability.

At the end of their turn each round, a character may make a *resist* [15] check to regain control of themselves.

Usage Note: Don't overuse domination on heroes. Not only is it powerful, but it can be divisive when players decide it's most expedient to gun down the Whisper-puppet character.

This is best used once in an encounter, generally as an opener.

Call the Horde

Incidental

The suzerain arm can summon four berserkers. These arrive at the street outside at the beginning of its next turn. It may take them several rounds to reach the players' location – but bear in mind the Whisper will open doors and operate lifts to speed the process.

The tainted gravity manipulator arm is an excellent lesson for the players – innocuous items can be the most dangerous items. That said, some groups may find the correlations to 'thing' from the Adam's Family unacceptable. If this describes your group, we recommend you give Carmen Light the arm, either to use like a club, or crudely attached in place of her own augmentation to create a more traditional suzerain.

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The Fourth Floor

The top floor of the building is by far the smallest, but it's also well decorated. A quick search confirms an executive bathroom, a barely functioning server room, and the paired PA/Managers office. The body of what is likely the PA is a disassembled mess stretching from the stairs to the manager's desk.

There is probably ¥10,000 worth of executive decorations the players can loot from here. You can also provide the S0103 – Level 4 if the players are making a habit of checking computers.

The First Floor

The ground floor of the DNR building is dominated by a large garden that has grown wildly out of control and is carpeted as much by water as anything else. A section of the skylight above is shattered as though something large came through it, and water pours in unimpeded.

The thick undergrowth of the veritable forest is trampled in places as though something huge has passed through it.

A *spot/listen* [15] check is required to spot the collector hiding in the garden.

Sick Collector – Stats

Movement: 5 Dash, 10 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +5, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+6) in *force, spot/listen, athletics*

DEFENCES

Cover 15	Evade 10	Base 2
	IC 8	

Armour: Steel (Fibreweave weak points)

Wounds Tolerance: N/A (Self repair)
Collectors repair all damage they've suffered at the beginning of each round. To defeat one, you must destroy it completely, requiring a blast weapon with an AP of at least steel.

Tactics and Gear

The players won't have a basis for comparison, but this collector is much slower than normal. Its call is hollow and almost sickly. Like most sick animals, it will defend itself fiercely if threatened.

These effects are caused by the Orikasa fragment it carries that is disrupting the Whisper's signal. This effect shouldn't be too outwardly visible at this stage, but if the players return later in the campaign to claim the fragment, the fight between the signals of the Whisper and the Orikasa fragment should be loud across the wireless and the machines behaviour should be equally erratic.

Equipment: The collector is carrying another gravity manipulator arm (housing an Orikasa fragment), a Hades Fire Control (still in its boxed kit) and a Hercules leg taken from Keiko.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +4	*Aim* +4	*Recoil* +0	*Melee* +4

TALENTS

Collectors Call

Incidental

The collector emits a shrill cry over the wireless that compels augments within extreme range to call back. Make a +6 wireless attack roll versus the IC defence of every character with augments. On a success, it knows the approximate location of the character with the augments.

If successful within short range, it determines the exact location, even if the character is hidden.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Harpoons (x2)

AP: Ceramic — Range: Medium

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Run Through
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Harpoons are fired as a pair, each with its own attack and damage roll. Any target that is at least punctured is caught by the harpoon. On the following round, the collector may reel the target in as an incidental action, moving them to an adjacent square. A character may attempt to hold their ground with an opposed *force* check.

A player can rip out a harpoon with a *force* [15] check, but barbs cause an immediate serious wound to the same hit location. The harpoon cable can be cut as a simple action by any slashing weapon with an AP of ceramic.

Grappling Claw

AP: Fibreweave — Range: Melee

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

On a successful attack, the target is pinned in the claw. Generally, targets are held against the floor or a wall.

Targets must beat the collector in an opposed *force* check to escape and when using the grappling arm, the collector gets a +10 modifier instead of its normal +6

Circular Saw

AP: Fibreweave — Range: Melee

Grazed	Lacerated	Clipped	Cleaved
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

On a pinned target, the collector does not roll hit location (it always targets the joining point for an augmentation. If the augment is in the skull or torso, it picks the most appropriate hit location to burrow its way in).

So long as the target remains pinned, each round the collector may attack the same character and hit location as an incidental action with no roll every round. Each round the collector may increase either the AP or the damage by one category until it achieves a cleaved result.

At that point, it collects the augment.

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There were two gravity manipulator arms in the test lab, one was tainted by the Whisper (the suzerain), the other was a shelter for an Orikasa fragment. The Whisper isn't entirely certain what the fragments are at this stage, but it is leery of their power.

This collector was called by the suzerain when it realised a group of humans were on their way to the facility and might acquire the arm. It picked up the arm, with the fragment, just before Arthur and his team arrived.

When Keiko fired on it, the collector retaliated, claiming her leg and then retreating to the garden. It's uncertain what is happening to it and is attempting to remain hidden, but it will fight if threatened.

It is possible, albeit unlikely, that the players may execute an elaborate plan to recover the other gravity arm. If this happens, you'll need to adjust your campaign quite a bit. Since the fragments can't communicate, the players won't realise the significance of what they have until they can get it to someone like Anita Ryan. They may sell it unknowingly, but more likely they'll carry it with them, something that will draw a lot of heat from the Whisper.

SESSION 1 HANDOUTS

The following handouts can be read aloud or printed from Appendix V p.327

S0101 – DNR LABS FLOOR 2

Subject: UPA will not be tolerated

To: All employees

From: Site Manager Carmen Light

We are aware that the run of seizures and mental breaks on Floor 2 have made many of you nervous. Managers are already reporting to me rumours of nerve gas, wireless attacks, and even vengeful whispering ghosts.

I'd like to reassure you that this building's wireless space is protected by state of the art firewalls, and every level is fitted with both toxin filters and alarms. I work in the same building as the rest of you, and I'm not afraid.

Despite this, I know of at least two employees who have made things difficult for the rest of us, in this already trying circumstance, by heading home without authorisation. As we near our looming release date, I would remind you of HR's zero-tolerance policy towards unscheduled absences. Those who succumb to paranoia may leave, but they will find they do not have jobs to return to.

S0102 – DNR LABS FLOOR 3

Subject: Re: QA concerns

To: Dr. Andrew Coles

From: Site Manager Carmen Light

Damnit Andrew, the test subject for the GMAs is arriving today, I don't want to hear reservations, and I certainly don't want to hear ghost stories about how one of the arms has started talking to you.

Keep your neurons out of the tabloid sites, and give me the greenlight on my damn prototype, or you can kiss your quarterly bonus goodbye.

S0103 – DNR LABS FLOOR 4

//Wireless Neural Conversation Log #347

Carmen Light – Site Manager: I'm worried about the communication blackout. If our test subject doesn't arrive as scheduled, is there any way to demonstrate the arms?

Danica Shia – Personal Assistant: Not according to the lab. The manipulator arms draw their power from the integral gravity harness the test subject already has. Without that, they're just a basic prosthetic.

CL: Sounds like excuses to me do… wait, did you hear that?

DS: Hear what ma'am?

CL: It sounded like… whispering… I…it… I'm activating the building lockdown and… I think we should talk face to face, can you come to my office?

**** LOG ENDS ****

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

FROM NOTES TO SESSION

As you can see, a lot of detail gets added between the notes and the session write-up. I had to make concrete the ideas I'd only sketched out before. I'll talk through some of my choices in detail.

The Intro

The Intro to your sessions is a critical moment. These are the words that act as a firebreak between everyone chatting and catching up, and the session itself. For that reason, your intro tone should match the tone you're aiming for in your session. I knew my players were into the cyberpunk atmosphere, and I wanted to use those dark rainy hues, but I didn't want to get so caught up in moodiness that the players felt they couldn't mess around in the universe. So, I took advantage of the inherent links between cyberpunk and film noir, and started with a melodramatic film noir intro. It captured the bleakness of the setting, and then I *gamified* it by going over the top in descriptive metaphor.

The Fire Suppression Mechs

I added these in both because they helped press the notion of 'recent apocalypse' and because they would mess with the players' expectations. Any time the players get too close to a giant robot or statue, there's a presumption that it will come alive. Placing some red herrings early, like a giant robot that doesn't attack, forces the players to recalibrate their preconceptions. This obviously means they'll be easier to catch off guard later, but more importantly, it helps the players immerse themselves in the universe when it doesn't feel like every single thing the GM describes is there to harm them.

The Collector

I included the collector because I realised I needed something that caused the salvage team to get in such dire straits. I then had the collector retreat to a difficult to access location. It was always possible that the players would run into it, but I wanted it to be 'out of the way' enough that it wasn't the first thing they'd stumble into.

I'm still not sure this is done right either. When entering on floor two of four, players may well go to the ground floor and then work their way up so that they know nothing is behind them. It would have made more sense to put the collector on the top floor or in a second structure accessible by a sky bridge.

We've left this oversight in the session write-up because, as sins go, it's a minor one, and it gives me the opportunity to make this point. In practice, running into the collector can be an important lesson for the players, and it is plenty survivable (my own group tangled with it for several rounds).

Keiko – the wounded scavenger

Having a critically wounded scavenger was important because it created a failable objective that couldn't be completed by simply 'killing all the baddies'. This is another immersion element I like to get into the game early – break the players from the idea that quests are just fluff in between combat.

The Lock on the Arm Containment System

Besides giving me a setup for the trap, this also was an important piece of misdirection. Putting an elaborate lock on it made it seem like treasure, rather than danger. This was a fun ambush, but things like this can be overused, you don't want your players to be afraid of investigating anything because of constant ambushes.

One good way to mitigate this is to make sure that suspicious players are able to determine the existence and nature of a trap if they correctly guess that one exists. Ultimately for a trap to work, you have to outsmart the players, not 'out-rule' their characters.

The Orikasa Fragment

In the notes, the collector downstairs is carrying a second gravity manipulator arm with an Orikasa Fragment. While I did later on implement this (and the notes here were updated to reflect that), the original arm did not include an Orikasa Fragment, and the collector was not 'sick'. Understanding the actual order of events should give you some insight into how to keep a campaign flexible.

So the reason the collector had a manipulator arm in the first instance was that I didn't want to give this powerful augment out on the very first session. Worse still, I had to allow for the possibility that the players might find a way to 'untaint' the suzerain arm (the rules don't really suggest it's possible, but they also don't rule it out), in which case the Experimental augmented could end up with two augments out of the first session.

By giving the arm to a collector, I didn't rule out the possibility of the players acquiring it, but if they did they'd have certainly earned it. More likely, they wouldn't recover it, and I would have a reason for

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the players to revisit this site as more powerful, self-assured heroes. This would also give me another opportunity at character development for Bolts'n'Bones, once I'd seen more of his character.

I didn't even think of placing an Orikasa Fragment here until I was working on the write-up for Session 2, which meant that there was never any real chance of the players 'accidentally' finding the fragment. Of course, they didn't know that, so later on, when they did come back and get the fragment, the group were impressed that I'd hidden it right under their nose. The lesson here is pay close attention to what the players see and don't see as they pass through the world: anything they didn't look at can be retrospectively changed to great effect. It's not an all-the-time thing, of course, but if you use it for significant moments, it can take your game to the next level.

POST-SESSION COMMENTS

Most things went just about to plan. The players didn't kill Kramer. They were suitably anxious about the fire suppression robots and especially disquieted by the lost typing away on their computers. Those computers led to my biggest mistake – one of the players asked to look over the shoulder at what the lost was writing, and I thought this would be a great moment to demonstrate the infectious nature of the Whisper. After making a successful roll versus their character's IC defence, I informed them that they'd seen the Whisper in the gibberish on the screen and had them sit down and start typing some gibberish of their own.

The effect on the character lasted only one round, but the effect on the *players* lasted much longer – they believed that any computer could attack them in this manner and stopped interacting with them altogether. I thought it was quite evident that the issue was reading something the lost had written, but that wasn't the players take away, and it wasn't until several sessions later that we were able to set the record straight. If the safe-text filter program had existed when we played I might have gotten away with this, but either way, the lesson is if you punish your players for curiosity, they will stop being curious. I already knew this, but some lessons you keep learning in new ways.

The biggest surprise of the session was the escape of the suzerain arm. I was never certain whether the players would try to capture it intact or just destroy it, but I didn't expect them to be overwhelmed by it. It's not that the arm was over-powered, or the players particularly reckless – the dice simply turned against them in a brutal and relentless way. Prudently, the players elected to grab the scavengers they came to rescue and retreat. Keeping retreat as a viable option is a good way to keep encounters from turning unexpectedly fatal, whether due to your own error, or just cruel dice gods.

UPDATING THE LAMP-POSTS

This is what my lamp-posts looked like after I updated them:

1) Players learn about the world / status quo. (arc I)

1.1) Players see Eddings Park, repair a vital resource for it.

1.2) Players meet resistance. Learn that the suzerain arm has infiltrated the arcology.

1.3) Chubs detective case – provides possible way into arcology.

1.4) Players visit the arket, meet a fixer. Get mission to track down Orikasa Fragment.

1.5) Recover first fragment, first vision.

2) Players discover the first Orikasa Fragment, kicking off a search for more and learning about the cause of the Whisper along the way. (arc II)

3) The players, plus Orikasa, now work together to defeat the Whisper. (arc III)

4) At least one demonstration of the Whisper's ability to 'hack' someone who isn't connected

5) John De Lancie chiding humanity for its reach exceeding its grasp.

6) Meet Meiliir's teacher/master.

7) Shotgun Citizen should be a major figure in the players' home village.

8) Bolts'n'Bones returns to the DNI facility?

9) Surge Protector runs stage shows in the settlement, speaking to his vanity and selling Stratum products.

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Note that most of the development has occurred in the first arc. Some of these ideas are new, others refer to elements I came up with in the short notes. These events are ordered by expected chronology, but they can be easily switched up.

UPDATING THE SHORT NOTES

Below are how my short notes looked after updating for Session 1.

Session 2

1) Return to Eddings Park, meet the locals. Players should be respected here and have their own homes.

1.1) Shotgun Citizen has a fortified building full of traps and escape routes. S/He is the security chief and co-founder.

1.2) Chubs has his own PI office, metal filing cabinets and Venetian blinds. Should get his first case on visiting.

1.3) Surge protector is a hit with the village, especially the children. People probably think he's a little crazy, but he's lively and entertaining which is rare post-Shatter.

1.4) Meiliir has no special accommodation, she's the outsider here, not unwelcome, but definitely not 'one of the gang'.

2) Resolve the rescue. Congratulations for saving the team.

2.1) Li Wei (town engineer) creates a Faraday cage for catching the suzerain arm.

3) Chubs gets his first case – should be delivered by a femme fatale and involve an elaborate double play.

3.1) Chubs is hired by 'Fatale Young' to recover an amulet stolen from her by a paramour/con man: Michael Redding ('Herr Redding'). If pushed, she'll admit her mother gave her the amulet, and she can't face her family admitting that it was stolen

3.2) In actuality, the amulet is just a container the real Fatale Young used to smuggle out the arcology control codes. Michael Redding seduced her and convinced her to do this before killing her.

3.3) The woman hiring the players is not the real Fatale Young. She is an impersonator who plans to rob the arcology and used Redding to get the codes she needed. She planned to kill him and take the amulet, but he got wise and fled.

3.4) When the players catch up with him, he should have a photo showing the real Fatale Young – clearly deceased.

4) The village master gives the players a new quest to repair a water pumping station. Another settlement also shows up at the pumping station- both should suspect the other of sabotage.

5) A resistance faction asks to operate out of the players' village.

Session 3

6) The players should find Redding in East Block, depending on the below events, he may already be dead with another scavenger having nabbed the amulet.

7) If the players join the resistance, they should be given a mission to investigate a gathering of berserkers near East Block. The berserkers will have taken over the settlement by the time the heroes arrive.

8) If the players don't join the resistance, Master Ren should send them to East Block on a trade mission (or escorting one). The players are caught up in the fall of East Block and must get the trader out safely.

Session 2: Return to Eddings Park

As Session 2 is now the next session, I've added significant detail. Most of this is ideas on how to make the heroes a part of the settlement in a way that would be meaningful for each player. The town engineer provides the players with a thoughtful gift – an item given to the players without questions or trade attached, in consideration of recent challenges they've faced. This not only establishes Li Wei as a friend, but also helps immerse the players by breaking the model of heroes only receiving treasure as loot or quest reward. In this case the Faraday cage is designed to be large enough for the suzerain arm that caused the players so much trouble previously.

The last major element you'll note is that I fleshed out Chubs' side quest, including the double play. Even though the heroes aren't expected to uncover any of the details of the double play until Session 3, I thought it was critical that I have a clear picture

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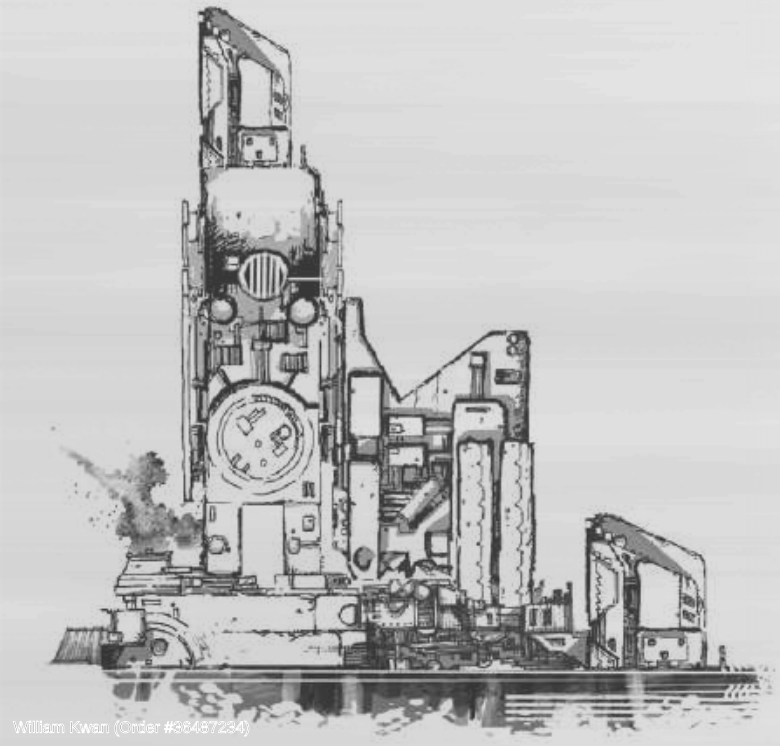
myself from the get-go. You never know what your players might do, so fleshing out a short but complex side plot like this helps if you have to adlib due to some unexpected player action.

You'll also note that, although this plotline is entirely unnecessary to the main quest, the reward provides access to the arcology (either from an arcology grateful to have a plot thwarted, or by the fake Fatale continuing to string the players along). Seeding side quests with rewards that have long-term use is a great way to tailor the story to your players. In this instance, there's no immediate need for the players to get into an arcology, but if they do later, you can bet Toby will call on the rewards from this episode.

Session 3: Visiting East Block

The big change to Session 3 is moving the question about joining the rebels to the end of Session 2. It should always have been there because it should rightly influence all events that follow and if you put such a pivotal choice at the start of a session you basically need to write two sets of session notes.

Because of this choice, you'll note that the short notes for Session 3 include two mutually exclusive possibilities, and that I haven't written a thing for Session 4 (though there are some lamp-posts that would probably apply). I find it critical not to chase the rabbit down one exciting path too much before letting the players make a major decision – not only does it mean more work for me if the players choose the option I wasn't expecting, it also means I am already framing the choices in my head in terms of right and wrong, or at least 'main path' and 'alternate path'.



BEYOND THE FIRST SESSION

The campaign was amazing, and I think it will stick with all of us for a long time. Sometimes it was very fun, very funny, and sometimes very dark. Once or twice, something happened that was so heroic the players looked at the people across the table from them with new-found respect.

In the second session, our heroes did decide to involve themselves with the resistance. They dealt with a few threats before coming across the first Orikasa Fragment. Its recovery made the Whisper tear apart the city trying to find them, and they fled via digital gate to the Imperial fleet (by this point they had already made contact with a fleet agent who provided the location). They worked with the fleet to track down the remaining fragments, working quickly as the Whisper used its own ships to try and force a decisive engagement.

Once they had the fragments, Orikasa was reformed, and the players went on the offensive against the Whisper. I decided that, because of the energy that Olicia was providing as banshee, the players would have to defeat her first. As it played out, they freed her from the Whisper, but failed to tether and destroy her. They also learned that the Ur had consumed the remaining Paligar aspect, and it was now clear that Orikasa alone would not have been able to tether it. One of the players would have to ascend.

One of the heroes (a late-joining disconnected called Stagg Mortlock, played by Sean) knew of a secret facility where they could complete the procedure, and here the patron (as Doctor Delancie) ascended Chubs while the other heroes held off the Whisper's conventional forces. Delancie had also put a kill-switch into both the Chubs-ascended and Orikasa while they were connected to the facility network. The control for this kill-switch was given to the party's disconnected because they were the only one who could keep it a secret from the ascended.

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Escaping from the lab, the heroes rallied everyone they could and laid a trap to draw out the Ur by seizing back control of the fleet. In a climatic fight, the Ur was tethered to three different foes aboard the Whisper's flagship, and the heroes had to split up to face them. Each of the three opponents were tailored to resonate with the player facing them, and every round the players took, it became harder for Chubs and Orikasa to keep the Ur tethered, and the fleet battle swung in the Whisper's favour. Ultimately good prevailed, however; and our heroes killed the Whisper.

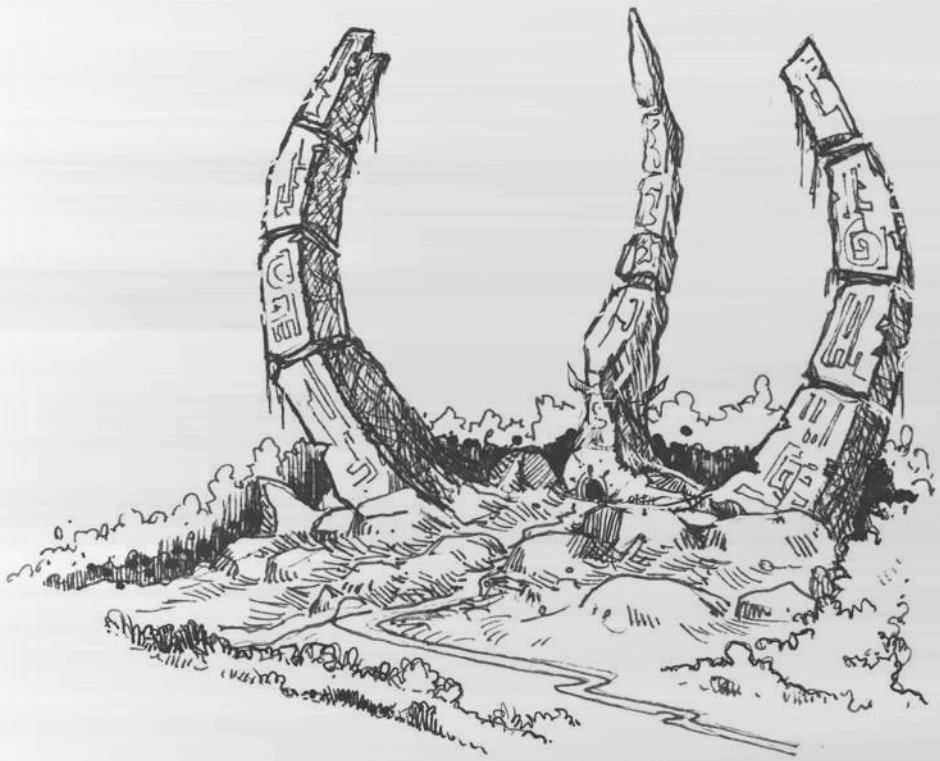
And then Sean pressed the kill-switches.

I think he surprised everyone. I'd included the switches as a way to allow the players to walk away from the campaign confident that, should ascension prove to be inherently corrupting, there was a fail-safe. Sean decided the ascended were too powerful for even that risk, and while Toby wasn't thrilled that his ascended character was canonically murdered, even he agreed that this was a fair way to wrap up the story. Unexpected perhaps, but it was an ending to remember.

In hindsight, I got lucky here. I gave the table's newest player a kill-switch for another player, expecting never to see it used (after all, the friendly ascended were critical up to the last minute of the last session). If Toby had gone ballistic and everyone walked away from that last session angry, it would have served me right. But that didn't happen, the group had months of great times behind them, and no one was looking to pick a fight. Everyone wanted the session to end in the right way and this, though just a little bleak, felt right.

The lesson here (besides not giving kill-switches to your players) is that even if you make mistakes – and you will – occasional errors won't ruin a campaign. Games are ruined when you think it's your right to make mistakes, when you think the mistakes aren't mistakes anymore and you can run roughshod over the players for your own enjoyment.

I set out to make a great experience for my players, I held true to that, owned my mistakes, and ultimately it became everything I'd hoped and more.



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MILESTONES

Giving characters a level-up is a critical moment in the evolution of your campaign. Done well, it is a reward for a hard-won challenge and a logical moment for a character to show their greater strength. Done poorly, it will feel arbitrary, and your players will resent you for playing god.

Below we look at the milestones that saw the test players receive their level-ups.

General Comments

To kick things off, let me say that I almost always level my characters up together in *Wireless Soul Transmission*. Any challenge significant enough to be a milestone was almost certainly faced as a team, so it logically follows that the heroes benefit collectively. It also sidesteps the issue of players being concerned that you're playing favourites.

I also provide level-ups at the end of sessions, rather than part way through. This lets the players level-up in-between sessions, and at their own pace. Before, or mid-session level-ups are time consuming an invariably see several players looking for something else to do while someone agonises over where to put that last advancement point.

Reaching Level 2:

I normally like to give my players a level-up straight off the end of Session 1. After all, the heroes were doing stuff *before* right, so whatever marks the border between backstory and the (capital 'S') Story must be significant.

I made a rare exception in this case, only because my heroes botched the first session so badly. The suzerain arm escaped, Keiko died, and the players almost had to abort entirely. Getting a bloody nose can be a milestone certainly, but in this case, I think the players would have felt I was humouring them.

So instead I gave the players their level-up at the end of Session 2 – citing the way they had met with members of another settlement over the broken water supply and prevented matters from escalating.

Reaching Level 3:

By the end of Session 3, the heroes had taken down their first collector and taken control of an arcology facility from the Whisper. These firsts definitely warranted another level-up.

Reaching Level 4:

In Session 4 the players recovered their first Orikasa Fragment. Providing a level-up for this, and every other fragment they recovered, was a given.

Reaching Level 5:

Session 5 wouldn't have seen a level-up, but the players went above and beyond. They had travelled out of the city to find a digital gate. At the same facility, there was a ronin (a weak one but still).

The ronin had the people of the facility terrified, but it was contained. Our party decided they couldn't leave this thing to menace those in the facility, and not only did they defeat their first ronin, but they did so with keen efficiency. Everyone felt it was worth a level-up.

Reaching Level 6 through 9:

Each of these level-ups were in response to the players recovering an Orikasa Fragment. That is not to say some other impressive feats weren't achieved as well. They defeated a powerful suzerain that was looking to ascend to replace the defeated aspect of the Whisper, saved Shōgun Sora from an assassination attempt, and overcame a powerful nemesis from the Surge Protector's past.

Reaching Level 10:

Level 10 was big. The players went to defeat the pseudo-aspect that Olicia val Skye had become. It didn't go well (you'll learn more if you read the Moments of Truth section below) but this was very different to the first session.

Olicia escaped because the players allowed her to in order to save one of their own. It would have been criminal not to provide a level-up at this point.

Reaching Levels 11 and 12:

The penultimate session began with a lot of doubt for the players and their allies. Many of their allies had abandoned them, and they were well into the territory of drastic measures.

By the end of the session, they'd turned that around. They'd rallied a new fleet and had a plan for defeating the Whisper. More importantly, they'd forced the Whisper to retreat from an attack, a first, not just for the players, but for anyone.

I gave them two level-ups here, bringing them up to Level 12 for the final session. Whatever game system I'm playing, I like to give a couple (or more) level-ups just before the players go into the final session. Not only does this give them a big kick in power, but on the heroes' journey, this is the moment when they find their second wind, when they reach out to see what they're really capable of. Your second last session *should* feel like a moment when the heroes unlock inner strength they didn't know they had.

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MOMENTS OF TRUTH

The following section covers a number of moments when the flow of the campaign called on the GM to handle an important issue. Whether relating to the story, the heroes or the players themselves, it is these moments that can bog a campaign down in argument or minutia.

Obviously the below is not intended to represent the only, or even 'ideal', approach. It merely demonstrates one way this has been done in a live 'under-pressure' situation.

OVERLAPPING STORIES

One unique challenge I faced with *Wireless Soul Transmission* was the need to tell two stories simultaneously. The first story was the present, where the players confront and defeat the Whisper. This primary story relied on the second, the story of Dr. Orikasa and of how the Whisper came to be.

Choices

I realised early that telling the secondary story would be the difficult part – the players were the drivers for the main story, and so long as I kept things from becoming dull, or unclear, they would press forwards. Since I already knew the players were going to be picking up Orikasa Fragments at key moments, I decided these were the ideal time to share elements of the Whisper's escape. Visions would be cool, I decided; wireless connection made it possible, and I realised I could actually let the players take an active part in past events – effectively playing characters from Orikasa's team. This would also lead the players towards guessing that the fragments were an ascended Orikasa before I revealed it when the last fragment was collected.

Because I knew that the backstory revelation would get complex, I actually lamp-posted the visions separately. Once I'd hammered out what would be provided in each vision, and in what order, it was easier to interweave them into the main story for maximum dramatic effect. Worth mentioning that it was the number of visions that defined the number of Orikasa Fragments, not the other way around.

Outcome

It worked brilliantly (even if I do say so myself). Not only were the players brought closer to the key actors of Orikasa's team, they also got a chance to mess around with high-level characters from different classes. Some bad rolls when ascending the collector (i.e., the human criminal who was the first test subject) led to the players' idea that his mind had been damaged during the upload and that they were, in part, responsible for the machines he later inhabited.

BELLE LEAVING

Perhaps the greatest misfortune of our game was losing Belle after Session 3. She and Toby had a major falling-out outside of the game and realised that they wouldn't be able to play together amicably. Belle made the decision to step away for the good of the group.

Choices

I got lucky, normally when this sort of issue hits, it hits the table in a big way, and often people look to you as the GM to somehow fix a broken friendship. This group is quite emotionally mature, and Belle decided to depart before things got out of hand and without calling on the GM to take a side.

In this instance, the most important choice I'd made was to let go, and this is harder than it sounds. There's a strong temptation to ask the player to 'give it one more shot', or to 'just ignore him and have fun', both of which are clearly unreasonable except when they're on the tip of your tongue.

Outcome

There are no good outcomes to this sort of thing, but one player stepping away before the group polarises into opposing camps is, in my experience, the least of many evils.

Belle did request that her character show up now and again to help out, which was honoured through appearances akin to the Mysterious Stranger from the *Fallout* franchise – Shotgun Citizen would appear out of the blue to fire off a couple of shots and then vanish down an alley.

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SERI'S AVAILABILITY

At one time, Seri was one of my most dependable regulars, but part way through our *Wireless Soul Transmission* test he committed to a serious relationship that changed his priorities. In fairly short order, it became impossible to find session times that he could accommodate.

Choices

I was slow to recognise what was happening. It's not uncommon for players to go through periods of reduced availability in the midst of a significant life change, and I was better at compromise than I was at recognising a permanent change.

After several sessions, I finally realised that Seri would only attend sessions few and far between. At this point we were down to three players, so I started the process of finding a replacement which saw Sean join us in the persona of Stagg Mortlock.

Outcome

While we found a new equilibrium, I recognise that I could have acted sooner. Saving a seat at the table for someone who might come back soon is a good and noble thing to do, but given our numbers, I could have gone hunting for an extra player sooner. If Seri had become reliable again, we'd have had five players, which is no more than we'd started with, and arguably preferable to running with three.

For Seri's departure we didn't really write any story explanation, I suspect most players just assumed he stayed in his room on the ship for the rest of the adventures. Some groups feel a strong need to tie up loose ends like this, but technically, he'd never formally left the group, and even if he had, I'm not sure the effort would have been necessary for this set of players.

SEAN JOINING US

Sean joined the group quite late in the campaign, and that meant he had to hit the ground running. Besides having to catch up with the story, he was joining a group he mostly didn't know, running a system he'd never played. For my part, I didn't know him either, and that meant I had to find a way to involve him in the story even though I barely knew anything about him, his playstyle, or his character.

Choices

The first thing I did was made sure someone at the table was willing and able to help him learn the mechanical part of the game. In this case it was the one person he knew, but that wasn't my priority – what was important was finding someone who would help him with the mechanics without trying to corral him into a particular play style.

At the start of each session, I ask the players to recap the events of the last session in order to make sure everyone remembers things the same. For Sean's first session, we extended this back to the beginning. This primer alone was not enough, so I spent a little more time on characters and objectives to make sure any assumed prior knowledge was recapped for our newest player.

The last challenge was also the most difficult – from the origins up, *Wireless Soul Transmission* expects the GM to build connections between the player characters and their story. Despite his late entrance, I wanted Sean to feel that connection, so I linked his character to several elements of the core story and had a long-time character feel a commonality for him, and ultimately sacrifice herself to help him succeed in the final battle.

Outcome

Sean assures me he had a blast, and that's more important than anything I'll say below.

The rules he picked up easily; Sean's good with technical information, so he may have been fine even without a player helping him out. Still knowing he wasn't just expected to figure it all out alone is a critical part of bringing someone new to the group.

The pre-session recap actually proved very valuable for the established players as well – we were entering the final act of the story and almost everyone had forgotten some detail that would contribute to the grand finale. For Sean's part, I think the short recaps attached to objectives and characters were probably more valuable, but I'd still recommend doing both.

Lastly, integrating Sean into the story was only a middling success. The story links probably worked better than the major NPC connection. Her gesture was touching, but probably meant more to the rest of the players than it did to Sean. Still I must have gotten something right, or he would never have felt invested enough to use the kill-switches in the middle of the epilogue.

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HERO DOWN

In Session 10 a player character died. An Imperial enforcer had appeared in the middle of the players' mission to take out Olicia. He was a tough opponent, and the heroes were up against the clock. Meiliir closed to melee range, Chubs threw a plasma grenade.

"*Watch out for Mei,*" James admonished.

"*She can dodge out,*" Toby replied.

"*So can he,*" Cas said and rolled a d20, "*29* force *to grab him and hold us both in place.*"

And that was how Mei died.

Choices
Wireless Soul Transmission has plenty of built in ways to reduce the chance of a player character being killed in one hit, but this was different. Cas was choosing this, and as a GM the only thing I could do was make sure that she understood that there would be no springing back from this.

Past that, it was just about making the description as dramatic as possible.

Outcome
Toby was not as accepting of Meiliir's death as Cas was, especially given he had provided the vehicle of her demise. I hadn't intended for there to be a way to save her, but creative players find solutions.

There were three ronin in the base which were necessary to tether and destroy the Olicia aspect. Toby aptly deduced that, if Sora could be forced to use the Jin Mastery talent to save Asur, then a ronin could be forced to save Meiliir. They let Olicia escape so they could dominate a ronin and use it to bring Meiliir back. For the rest of the game she had the same spider blood as the ronin.

PLAYER VERSUS PLAYER

Letting Olicia escape was not a unanimous choice for the players. While Toby was bent on saving Mei, James was more interested in the mission (given Mei had died to let them accomplish it). Things came to a head when Chubs used an EMP grenade to disable Surge Protector.

Choices
Barring outside control like the Whisper, this is the first time I have ever allowed a player character to launch a direct attack on another player, and I did not allow it lightly.

My intention was that the EMP attack roll serve as the 'tie breaker' in their disagreement. I would not have allowed repeat attempts or counter-strikes – for the same reason I wouldn't allow a weapon that had any lasting ramifications. The roll had to settle a dispute and drive the story, not create a grudge.

Beyond this all I can say is 'know your players'. Learn to read them, see who is more invested, or more likely to snap, who is role-playing a position their character has that they may not share.

Outcome
James was understandably annoyed, but only briefly, and the act pushed the story forward with more dramatic power than anything I'd written in my session notes. It allowed me to resolve the disagreement without 'taking a side'

But this doesn't mean it wasn't a risk. You can never be certain, so until you know your group, and know they will forgive you, be conservative.

NOT INCLUDING A DISCONNECTED AGENT OF THE WHISPER

If you read my lamp-posts earlier, you'll note that I was excited by the idea of a disconnected traitor. Around Session 4, I even made early plans that the leader of the resistance would turn out to be this traitor.

In the end, this didn't happen. The resistance leader stayed on Hansei when the party left, and I made no further attempts to bring in this character, or any other traitor.

Choices
It is often said that, in writing you must be ready to kill all your darlings (feel free to attribute to your choice of literary luminary, everyone else does). Around the time the players were leaving Hansei, I realised my players would find the idea of a disconnected traitor annoying rather than fun.

Throughout my early campaign, I was throwing choices at the players to gauge where their interests lay. Letting the resistance stay in Eddings Park

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suggested they wanted to take a more active role in fighting the Whisper; neglecting to report Fatale Young's death to the arcology suggested a desire not to get mixed up in arcology politics; so on and so on. Obviously, there's no choice you can throw at your players to reveal their feelings on surprise traitors, but you can extrapolate. One of my group's favourite things about the digital apocalypse was the way it put all the survivors on the same team. That's why they were avoiding the arcologies, why they took a risk to help the other survivors, and even why they didn't kill Kramer in the very first session.

Sometimes I'll still include something that I think is cool, even if the players might be indifferent to it, but that was not the case here. Introducing this element of distrust among the survivors would have transformed the game in a way that removed an element the players deeply enjoyed.

Outcome

I spoke to some of the group following the campaign and they confirmed that they'd have found a Whispered disconnected a bridge too far. Interesting in discussion perhaps, but just annoying in game.

On a side note, I did include some degree of faction conflict among the survivors, such as the Imperial enforcer stepping in to stop the destruction of the Olicia aspect. What was key, is they were never working for the Whisper, and they treated combat with the survivors (including the players) as a last resort. By considering the motivations of the parties involved, the players could head off friction before it devolved into mutiny.

FAILING THE MAIN QUEST

During the final session, our heroes technically failed. Chubs decided to fire a shot at the enemy flagship while the rest of the party were aboard. The shot would have been spectacularly lucky if the objective had been to destroy the ship – it hit the bridge for maximum damage, destroying it completely.

Unfortunately, Meiliir and Stagg were fighting a tethered Whisper aspect on the bridge at the time. Besides killing two party members, the shot destroyed the tethering effect, allowing the Whisper to escape.

Choices

We stopped and had a quick discussion at this point. We could have played on, but a lot of factors were starting to turn against the players at this point, and salvaging victory seemed like a statistical impossibility.

Obviously, the last session is way too late to roll up some new heroes and try again. The climax was built around the idea that it was our last chance to stop the Whisper, and even if it wasn't, the players were pumped to resolve this tonight. We could also have accepted the defeat as the net result of the campaign, but that seemed poor payoff after investing so much.

So we decided to 'load a save game' just before Chubs fired, and play from there. To prevent this from removing all gravitas from the situation, I warned that this would be the only time I'd allow this. Any further disasters would have to be played out in full.

Outcome

Chubs elected not to fire on the flagship. The fight was hard fought, but the heroes triumphed without further catastrophe. In some ways, that moment of failure, put the success into sharper relief – demonstrating that it was just one successful path among many that led to failure.

CLOSING COMMENTS

From the milestones I've described, it may seem like I had a pretty easy time of things. Sure things went wrong, but nothing completely exploded, and I think that speaks to an important point.

Prevention is easier than resolution. We all know the story of the *Titanic* and once it hit that iceberg I'm pretty sure we all know it was going down. What if they'd turned aside instead of steaming into it?

I can't point to all of the moments in sessions when I made small changes in course to keep things running smoothly. What I can do is warn you to always look ahead, address concerns before they become complaints, apologise for your mistakes, and correct them before they become catastrophes. You won't dodge every iceberg, but if you make an honest effort, most of your problems will be no more drastic than mine were.

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IMPLEMENTING ORIGINS

We strongly recommend reading the origin stories chosen by the players in your group early and developing your campaign around elements of these. Better still, get the player to tell you about the origin they chose (even if you're familiar with it) so you can learn what elements stuck with them, and what they barely remembered. This becomes especially important if there is something the player would like to change.

If you need further inspiration, we have included some ideas on integrating the various origins in the following sections.

WHO GOES FIRST

You shouldn't try to cram references to every player's origin into every session. The idea is to give each player a sense of connectedness to the world, and if you rush this, it will seem token.

So, if you're going to focus on one character at a time, who goes first? If you discussed their origins with the players already you should be able to answer that. The player who is most excited and enthusiastic about their character's backstory and who has probably already added plenty of detail onto the material in the *Play Guide*… that player is a solid pick for first in line. By contrast, a player who chose their origin purely based on stats and gear may need a little longer to develop a character concept before spectres of the past start showing up and demanding help or answers. Some players will develop their character on the fly, and you shouldn't press them for details until their ready.

Beyond these guidelines, it's really just about what makes sense in the story you're telling. It might be that the ginbushi is super excited about their character, but until the next arket, there's not a lot of justification for addressing the story about a sordid love affair between a junior ginbushi and the zaibatsu director's son.

EXPERIENCE DISPARITY

One common question that must be addressed in character stories is the character starting level. In most games, your players will start at level 1, but many origins, such as the War Veteran augmented or the Obsolete augmented, suggest significantly more experience. There are two main ways of handling this:

Skill decay

The most common answer to this problem is that the highly skilled character has lost some of their abilities through disuse or trauma. Some origins, like the Obsolete, have built-in downtime or trauma. For others: six years spent figuring out just how to get food, water, and a safe place to sleep will have impacted training regimes drastically. As for trauma: the Shatter itself destroyed many people's entire memories, others have lost the use of perfectly functional limbs – for survivors to find large gaps in their knowledge and capabilities is not at all unusual.

Level catch up

For small level gaps (we'd recommend no more than two or three levels) it can be okay to start your characters at different levels. You need a lot of trust from your players to pull off something like this, and it's important that you don't abuse that trust by making your high-level character the hero of the story. Two elements are critical when employing this approach. First, the higher-level character cannot level up, for any reason, until the party has caught up. Second, it must be clear that this is a story choice, and not an act of arbitrary favouritism.

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AUGMENTED ORIGIN EXAMPLES

DEBUTANT

The big story of the Debutant is their first augmentation, and since augmented are fairly dependant on augmentations to compete with the other classes, it's best to get this out of the way early. Whatever your intentions, the party will likely consider the first augmentation they come across to be intended for the Debutant, so make it something good. Generally, pick an augmentation from the *Mastery Guide,* so it's a surprise, but try to make sure it matches the character's concept – your would-be cyborg assassin probably doesn't want a shoulder-mounted rocket system.

Just as important as the augmentation itself is the way in which the character gets it, and like the augment itself, the act of acquisition should be relevant for more than just one session. Perhaps a major NPC from the players' settlement is crippled (or killed) and insists (perhaps as a dying wish) that the Debutant take up the augmentation and, with it, the responsibility not simply to save the settlement from the current danger, but to become the NPC's de facto successor. Perhaps the party recovered an augmentation for a dangerous and unforgiving employer, but the Debutant was badly injured and installing the augmentation is the only way to save their life (have some care with this as it indebts the player significantly for their origin, which may not match their concept). Perhaps the Debutant's family were cyberneticists who were lost during the Shatter and the Debutant must follow clues to their family's old lab where their parents worked together up to the very moment of their deaths on a special augment for their child.

If your story includes the Orikasa Fragments, one of these could be in the augmentation the Debutant receives.

Lastly, consider supporting cast for this origin. The Debutant should face at least one well-meaning friend who can't understand the risk they're taking, and one authority figure who outright disapproves. Consider who will do the implant surgery as well. In some circumstances (like the gift from late parents) it might be best served by some sort of single-use auto-doc that lets the player use the augment straight away. Other stories should involve a doctor who is performing the surgery – are they proud or only performing the implant under duress. Even a gruff surgeon-for-hire might be inspired by the Debutant's courage.

EXPERIMENTAL

Like the Debutant, the Experimental augmented's story will likely be concerned with finding augmentations, in this case one of the other augmentations that were originally destined for the character. We might assume the gravity manipulator arms are the missing pieces here, but that's not strictly required, anything that feels sufficiently cutting edge will suffice.

Unless their backstory already features a visit, this character is going to want to make a trip to the Denim Neural Robotics Lab fairly early on, so plan a story thread that gives the whole party a reason to go there. If the players are sufficient level, you might have one of the augmentations still there, but if not there should be clues on where to go next.

As with the Debutant, consider that one of the augmentations might be carrying an Orikasa Fragment if these are present in your campaign.

Supporting cast is important to prevent this story turning into a glorified treasure hunt. Perhaps the players find a surviving employee from DNR, a good candidate for your group's cybersurgeon. This figure could act as a sort of moral guide for the player, eager to see the character reach their full power, but willing to oppose them if it seems they might use DNR's research for ill ends. Perhaps the player isn't the first Experimental; perhaps the employee mentioned above helped another test candidate who has since fallen to the Whisper or otherwise become a terrible menace. Perhaps the employee *is* the menace, having blackouts where he falls under the sway of his tainted augmentations, and his only hope is to ensure a new candidate has the means, and more importantly the moral fortitude to defeat him.

Assuming your game crosses multiple worlds, you should endeavour to visit the Experimental's homeworld. How do the people there regard him now, are they filled with bitter recriminations or just glad to see one of their own survived, if they're not happy to see the player, his acts of selflessness (assuming your players aren't wholly opportunistic) should inspire them to change their views and come to the party's aid in a time of need.

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WAR VETERAN

The augmented War Veteran's origin will work best if the players are given an opportunity to rejoin the Imperial Fleet. Here she can meet or learn the true fate of the commanding officer she saved in the Iron Rings campaign, and you can address the question of how deserters are treated (since the War Veteran clearly isn't still serving in any command structure when the game starts). You can even combine these two elements by putting the player on trial and then having the old CO come to her defence.

Even in the absence of the Fleet, the players can come across people from the War Veteran's more recent past. Perhaps a store vendor and fellow veteran who will provide a discount in exchange for the player's most outrageous war story. Perhaps the gate guard at the arcology the players need to infiltrate is someone the War Veteran saved during Operation Peril. This can go the other way too, occasionally the character should come across people who blame the Empire for not preventing the last six years of misery.

One fun trope to play on with this character is to make them a much higher rank than anyone expects. Never specify why, but have all manner of characters step aside with a salute and a 'ma'am'. Have the character's palm print or ID card provide access to secret high-security facilities. When the fleet's senior officers outline a plan, they end with 'assuming you agree, of course'. Giving the player this level of power is probably not a great idea for a first-time GM, but if your confident in your ability to adlib, it'll really surprise your group. Just don't turn the player's right to command into a responsibility – if you bust out a map of the Verdant Crest and ask the player what she intends to do about the logistical concerns of the force at Phobos, you may lose your players' interest.

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OBSOLETE

Since the Shatter, the Obsolete augmented character has been helping common survivors, and the early game should reflect that. People should be warm and accepting and, of course, grateful to the Obsolete. This should be contrasted with any actual ginbushi in the group who will be given respect out of fear.

As the game progresses, you should get a better idea of the direction the player wishes to develop in. If they seem to be seeking revenge, then have them cross paths with the Itero Group augmentations manager who signed them off as obsolete. This character should be a petty, penny-pincher whose life of excess and callousness towards the innocent makes him a satisfying target. Consider having your players forced† to do a job for this character first and only later given an opportunity to mete out revenge. Ideally revenge should involve stripping the manager of his power and prestige, replaced by someone either young and nano-augmented, or by the return of an old hand.

Some players might be looking for more of a story of proving worth. In this case, the augmentations manager should be less outright evil, though still no gem, and he should at some point need rescue, affording the Obsolete the opportunity to help where even normal ginbushi can't. This feat may require use of a specialised augment the player has acquired that provides abilities a ginbushi cannot duplicate (consider the Shinobi augment).

A dramatic finish for this character is to have them face a powerful ronin in a sword duel, not to win, but to hold the ronin at bay. It should be clear to everyone at the table that without equivalent ranks in *heijoshin*, such a fight is certain death. The Obsolete has an ace up their sleeve, however; for once they are out of wounds they can super charge their Budo to equivalent ranks in *heijoshin* to the ronin. Though this turns the fight around, the super charged augment releases toxic by-products into the Obsolete's brain, and they die when the fight ends. The message should be clear – equal to a ginbushi in ability, superior in courage.

† Force in this case means that while there is an alternative it is far less preferable for some fairly obivious reason. This should still constitute a valid choice however.

DISCONNECTED ORIGIN EXAMPLES

DISAUGMENTED

Within the settlement the Disaugmented individual should have a very mixed reputation. Many view her as an incredible figure, the one-armed wizard, a doctor who has saved dozens of scavengers despite a missing limb. Others, mainly augmented, believe she ran away from the Whisper and there should be occasional jeers: "So, besides you, how many people came out of that hospital alive?"

As the game progresses, the players should have reason to return to the hospital, where security footage provides the truth, piece by piece. The Disaugmented was one of TWO augmented surgeons on the ward that night. Once the player removed their own augment, they told the other doctor to lead the patients (many of whom were augmented) back to safety. Meanwhile the Disaugmented took the removed cyber-arm and led the collectors to the cybernetics stock room. The player then escaped the hospital only to find the other doctor alone. The doctor claims that he, being augmented himself, didn't want you to risk travelling with so many cyborgs, especially ones that can't move quickly.

The Disaugmented attacks her former colleague but having already over-exerted herself (considering her recent surgery) the player is easily overcome and knocked out. There are two obvious possibilities for the doctor after this point. One is that he was later caught by the Whisper and made suzerain of the hospital (you can have him taunting the players through the intercom as they uncover the past), the other is that he's become a street surgeon. If you pick the latter option, the question of revenge should be a little murky, he should regret his actions, and can the survivors really afford the loss of another doctor?

SOLE SURVIVOR

Though the Sole Survivor's written story ends with the crash landing, they have been in Aratayo for six years when the game starts. Considering what they've been through, they probably haven't rushed to find new friends, but there should be at least one. This friend

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

should have also lost a brother in the Shatter in a similar way and should be augmented. If your game includes Anita Ryan (see p.140), this could be her, hiding in plain sight while she guides the players towards the first Orikasa Fragment. If you don't use Anita, the friend should still be capable but have enough sense not to go where the Whisper can get them, and they should only be at risk if the settlement is attacked, or if the players are in trouble and you want to send the friend as part of a rescue. Your players will be expecting you to make a contrived attempt at having history repeat itself, so avoid doing so, this character should be better than the brother they lost and should surprise them with their resilience to the Whisper.

Of course, the other key element here is the Sole Survivor's ship. When the time comes to leave the planet, this vessel should be the ship of choice (or at least the only option left). Some players will be eager to get the ship up and running, and a recurring side quest can involve recovering the necessary components. Other players may decide their character abandoned the ship for a reason, in which case it can be intact but difficult to get to (placing it outside the city is an easy way to do so).

Once the players recover the ship, it should have more than its fair share of secrets, from hidden weapons and defence systems, to touching final messages from family members who knew the Sole Survivor would be the only one to survive the wireless phenomenon. To support this, consider making the Sole Survivor's parents Imperial agents, or part of some other organisation that could use a secret courier.

WHISPER ORPHAN

The Whisper Orphan's story is about inheriting a broken world. A solid start to this is to have Master Ren tutoring them, and while the reasons shouldn't be stated until later, his goal is to make the Orphan his successor. In general, this player should be the most trusted and respected figure in the settlement – people might go to Master Ren for wisdom and guidance, but people come to the Orphan when they need something done.

Consider that the Orphan's parents are still alive (technically), their father a lost, and their mother a berserker. Rather than throwing their mother at the player amid a horde of berserkers (where she'll be gunned down without hesitation), consider having the players meet a doctor who is working on a cure and encourages the Orphan to put the family into his care. This doctor should be on the level, but when crusaders find out what he's doing they decide to put a stop to it. After all, they won't believe a cure is possible, and they think anyone who claims otherwise is eroding people's ability to do what needs to be done. The players must decide whether they'll kill survivors to save the lost and berserker patients.

Don't forget to give this choice repercussions. The orphans are the largest group of survivors and they would be more than happy to help the players hold off the crusaders. On the other hand, letting the facility be destroyed will shatter the Orphan's good rep in Eddings Park, but would get them a contact with the more militant crusaders. These supporters should continue to aid the players throughout the game.

THE WOODSMAN

The Woodsman works well as a major security figure in Eddings Park. As someone who had predicted doomsday, they are a logical focal point for other disconnected survivors to have rallied around when the Shatter first hit. The Woodsman's knowledge of plants likely also helped with the beginnings of agriculture in Eddings Park.

Rather than constraining this fame to Eddings Park, you can have the players come across a struggling settlement. At least one member of the settlement should recognise both their own dire position and the Woodsman's skills. This gives the Woodsman an opportunity to make some decisions on the struggling settlement's future, demonstrate their expertise, and make some new allies. Having one of the members of this settlement stay on as a supporting cast member will let you develop the Woodsman further as a mentor figure.

Wireless Soul Transmission is a predominantly urban setting, so make sure you're keeping an eye out for locations and approaches involving nature. Don't invent anything that will clash, but keep in mind the overgrown parks of the city centre and the green span along the river. Don't be afraid to visit level-spanning gardens in arcologies, or to occasionally force the players to brave the kill zone beyond the city limits.

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GINBUSHI ORIGIN EXAMPLES

EBONSNOW CLAN

The Ebonsnow origin is a question of maintaining pride and honour after defeat. As a powerful warrior, lending her blade to their defence, the Ebonsnow is well liked by some, but for most, this individual who dares to still wear the Ebonsnow emblem only personifies the Empire's failure to protect its subjects. When implementing this, don't make the player's life a misery, people should still be grateful for their help, but they should face some questions they can't answer:

> "Where's the fleet?"
>
> "Are you a scout for a larger force?"
>
> "Does Mannheim know…"

Some individuals may have such undying faith in the Empire that they believe the player to be a vanguard of a larger force and will interpret any protest to the contrary as an elaborate cover story.

If possible bring Thera into the story, though not necessarily as a villain. Depending on the needs of the story, she could be either legitimately supporting the Ootori Syndicate or be infiltrating their arcology for ends of her own (perhaps to get weapons for a major crusader faction she is forming). Either way, she should be a source of support for the player, even, perhaps especially, if the player doesn't approve of her choices.

This is a pattern you can repeat. Plenty of former military, both Imperial and HPDF, are now living as scavengers, survivors, and merchants in the absence of organised resistance. Many of these would be inspired by the last Ebonsnow samurai still carrying the fight, and depending on their level of cynicism, might provide anything from direct advice and equipment, to looking the other way while players infiltrate the facility they're guarding.

STILLWATER CLAN

The quality of this origin will be heavily dependent on the character of the Itero family member the player is guarding. The Itero family member should have an almost idealistic desire to stop the Whisper but should otherwise have a similar moral compass to the party as a whole. The Itero should be limited in skills and abilities, especially in combat, but they should be aware of this and follow player instructions more often than not. As an Itero, this character is quite wealthy and should be willing to use their finances to help support the party, and the Stillwater player in particular.

The Itero character tends to work best as a fast learner. Once they realise they're inept at combat, they should ask the player to teach them to use a particular weapon (as chosen by the player). This pattern can be repeated with other elements, the player gradually shaping and building up the Itero scion until they become a powerful ally and a worthy successor to the Itero family.

This all leads to a point where the Itero character returns home to transform the zaibatsu into a force determined to oppose the Whisper. They'll definitely require the players' assistance in this, the Itero family are famously entrenched in old ideas. As soon as the Itero heir enters the board room, the ginbushi are summoned to throw her out. It is up to the player to hold the door against his clan mates, hopefully talking most of them down until Asuka, the house mother shows up. She will duel the player, and you should point out that this is a fight the player can't win, the house mother is one of the most powerful and skilled samurai alive.

Each exchange of blows should see the player knocked down, and each time they are given the opportunity to get back up. Ultimately Asuka will stop short of killing them, impressed by their resolve (especially if they landed a blow on her). She will wait until the situation in the meeting room resolves and, assuming the player's charge succeeds, she will see to it the player is given the best possible care. At this point, the ginbushi and the Stillwater clan both are allied to the players in their mission to stop the Whisper. How the player has 'raised' their charge will also define whether or not the Itero arcology falls under the heel of a tyrant or the care of a benevolent leader.

EBONSNOW

STILLWATER

WHITEBLADE

YUKI-ONA

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WHITEBLADE CLAN

In some respects, the Whiteblade Clan can be the easiest to implement. The Tencom Zaibatsu was responsible for the Shatter, and so the Whiteblades are wrapped up in the main story almost by default. Whether the players are searching for Orikasa Fragments, or just answers, they will find themselves visiting Tencom facilities and dealing with Tencom staff somewhere along the way. Where possible, the Whiteblade player should have some connection with these individuals.

The Whiteblade House Father, Hiroto, has more or less taken over their parent zaibatsu (though most of the corporation was lost with the arcology on Mannheim). Aspirants and house troops have been left to protect the Tencom facilities while the bladed samurai and higher have been consolidated aboard the clan's heavy cruiser *Infinite Refractions*. They were with Orikasa just long enough that their equipment is protected by adaptive firewalls and just long enough to learn what had happened on Paligar. The house master will not ally with the Sora-led Imperial Fleet and will strongly rebuke any Whiteblades searching for Orikasa Fragments. Under Hiroto's leadership the Whiteblades are looking for a means to destroy both the Whisper and Orikasa (who is viewed as just another Whisper waiting to happen) and ideally to do so without revealing Tencom's involvement in the whole affair.

But the Whiteblades are not united in this. The player's own mentor should represent a faction that is willing to work with Orikasa, either because they won't waste a chance to stop the Whisper or because they believe Orikasa represents something incredible. This faction will support the player even while the house father casts them out. Ultimately the Whiteblade player may be called on to return and challenge the house father, perhaps to institute themselves, or perhaps because they have found a surviving member of the Rhee family to restore to power. Either way, defeating a house master may require a willingness to use deceit. Note that some ginbushi players might never be willing to resort to underhanded tactics to achieve their goals, for this reason, we recommend pairing them early with at least one other ginbushi who is willing to do what needs to be done when the time comes. This character should be remorseful afterwards, and this action may drastically change the tone of their relationship with the player.

YUKI-ONNA CLAN

Early in the game you should introduce the Grandmother; have her provide some advice that is of tangible use to the players' next mission. She should come across friendly and wise, but also rough and direct. Meetings with her should take place in an old playhouse, and she should appear on stage as a somewhat hag-like figure, her lanky hair slashing dark shadows-over her face, her ancient fingers bony, and her clothing dirty rags. If the Yuki-onna asks who she-really is, explain that she was one of the oldest major shareholders of Raker Construction. Once she'd been a director and a daimyō, but she had retired before the Shatter. Her survival must be kept secret from the Whisper.

As the campaign continues, the Yuki-onna should find evidence that there are other white-robed ginbushi operating in the city, perhaps even meeting one. Exactly how many is up to you, but they should be a small elite force, all survivors of Raker Construction's ginbushi. Late game, the player should return to the playhouse to find all of the other ghost samurai gathered and an injured Grandmother standing over the body of one of their own. she reveals that 'this child' died in her defence and that one of the other ghost samurai attacked her.

Since the attack (and by extension, the fight between two of her own) was her fault she reveals the truth, namely, that she is not the daimyō and former director, just a playwright who looks very much like her. She laments the lie but does not regret for a moment the truth the ghost samurai have become. She says it is time for the ghosts to lead themselves, and her last gesture will be to appoint a successor.

Before she can, the traitor ghost shoots her. He lectures them on having lost their connection with their roots, abandoning corporate creed to follow some old woman. Then he draws his nano-forged katana and points out that, as the only bladed samurai, he is the senior ginbushi and invites anyone brave enough to challenge him.

This is where you should remind the player that they've been carrying around a nano-forged katana the whole game, and now would be a great time to try and use it. Assuming all goes well, the player should inherit control of the ghost samurai. Quick action by a medically skilled player may be able to save the Grandmother as well.

William Kwan (Quiz - 36 18/23)

NETWORK GHOST ORIGIN EXAMPLES

FREE AGENT

The Free Agent origin can be addressed in a very episodic way. If the players are investigating an abandoned arcology, the Free Agent might have a side job to find a former worker who disappeared the night the arcology fell; if the players are visiting a crusader settlement, the Free Agent might be on the lookout for a runaway child who may have joined them.

Since Free Agent stories are detective stories, don't be afraid to use the hallmarks of crime fiction, especially from film noir. Perhaps the last case the Free Agent was working on before the Shatter implicated the head of Neko Neko Media in the brutal murder of an escort. While the rest of the precinct wrote it off as a case that would never see a conviction, the Free Agent became obsessed with it and was seeking evidence right up till the Shatter hit. For years the obsession had to take a back seat to the practicalities of survival but when the heroes come across another woman murdered in the street, with all the hallmarks of the original case, the Free Agent is pulled back in. When they do finally arrive at the Neko Neko Media arcology with proof and an intention to see justice anyway they can, they find out the head of Neko Neko Media has been lost to the Whisper and the arcology has become a place of nightmare. Or perhaps the rest of the executive team have kept him locked in his suite and have gone to great lengths to keep his fall a secret while they seek a cure. What they don't realise is that the murderer has a secret way out.

While Free Agent side cases make a great break from the main story, don't be afraid to surprise the players by revealing that a side job was pivotal to the main quest. If your campaign includes Orikasa Fragments, the Free Agent might be unknowingly hired to collect one, perhaps by Anita Ryan (p.140).

For supporting cast, you can pull elements from your favourite police serial. Perhaps the Free Agent has a friend in an arcology lab who does forensic analysis. Perhaps they have a street kid who informs them on the activities of the Furui Kiga. You could even pair them with an uncomplicated partner who will be the Watson to their Sherlock.

IMPERIAL AGENT

Uniquely the Imperial Agent can have a key connection to the main history. Orikasa's team only learned of the Paligar and their achievements thanks to an Imperial Agent, specifically the Imperial Agent presented by this origin. Assigned by the Duke of the Verdant Crest because of Olicia Val Skye's involvement in the project, the agent traced back rumours from modern day Calino to the hidden world of Paligar. The agent actually acquired a key to the mountaintop bunker and also some images of a text called *In Defiance of the Martyr*. Throughout the mission to Paligar, the agent continued to operate behind the scenes, ensuring a fast ship was available, delaying guards sent to arrest Effinson during his visit to make contact with the rebels and providing additional weapons to the resistance for their uprising.

Not all of this had full authorisation from Imperial Intelligence, however; and the agent was recalled to Hansei to provide an explanation when the Shatter hit. By the time the agent reached the Hansei outpost, it had already evacuated, leaving no trace.

Because the discovery of the Whisper's origins are a large part of the game, we recommend that the Imperial Agent should only find out their knowledge about Paligar when the rest of the players do. It should be a surprise to the Imperial Agent as well when they learn how involved they were. After all, the agent isn't going to just sell out Imperial secrets, and while they might have suspicions, they don't know for sure what Orikasa's team found and what it might have to do with the Shatter.

In the early game, the Imperial Agent should have access to pre-Shatter Imperial safe houses and contacts. As the game progresses, their specific links to the Paligar should come to light. Knowing how to get to Paligar, having the key to the temple, and perhaps even a scene where they come clean to the party about their involvement. The Imperial Agent is a story about working alone, so for supporting cast, consider giving the Imperial Agent a foreign counterpart – an agent in the service of another power such as the Hulgari or the corporations. This isn't an ally in the traditional sense; right to the last, their motives should be unclear, sometimes they appear to help the players out of altruism or a sense of debt, and sometimes their apparent help is just manipulation.

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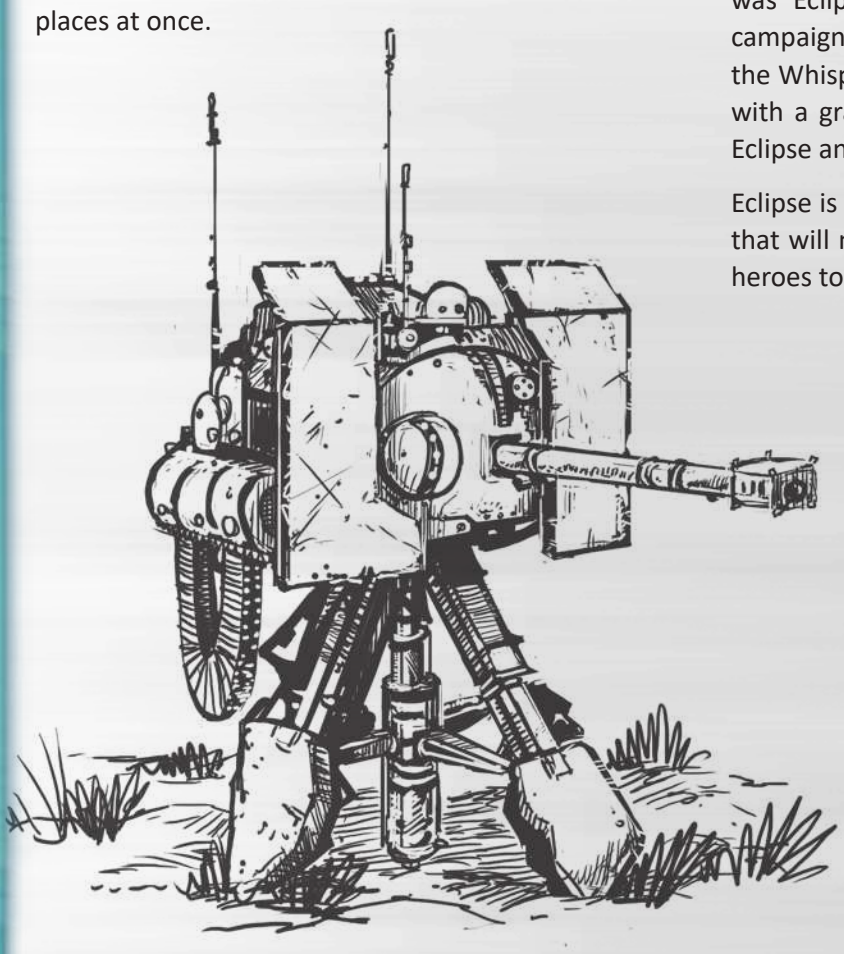
MACHINE HUNTER

The Machine Hunter is a very uncomplicated origin, and that often means the player who chooses it doesn't want past acquaintances forcing obligation on them. In these cases, focus your efforts instead on playing up how cool this character is. Give them a fan club in the settlement who thinks they're amazing but are too shy to talk to them directly; give them a mission to assassinate a suzerain where 'the best sniper in the world couldn't make that shot'.

If you believe your player is looking for a more involved story, then consider the following: The player was a member of an elite HPDF unit and was on leave when the Whisper hit. They left their significant other 'safe at home' and went out to join their unit. Like most, the squad lost many of its members to the Shatter and struggled to determine a clear direction against the Whisper after the loss of the HPDF command structure. When the Machine Hunter finally returned home, they found berserkers had broken in and killed their significant other in a suitably horrific way. The Machine Hunter hunts because they blame the Whisper so that they don't have to blame themselves. Ultimately, they'll have to see past that and rally up their elite teammates to help the players with a critical operation that would otherwise require the party to be in two places at once.



PARIAH

You can, and should, give the Pariah significant influence within the Furui Kiga. Individuals placed or blackmailed before the Shatter who will help the player while referring to some awful deed the Pariah did to secure their cooperation ('you'll let my mother go right?'). These individuals need not be only in Rōdō-sha, Bleeding Crane's roots were deep, and they had members in police, corporations, government, and even the military all across the Verdant Crest.

The Pariah's story can go beyond this, however. In order to run the shadow organisation that would one day take over the Bleeding Crane in a single, elegant move, the Pariah was using a heavily modified military intelligence ANI called Eclipse. With the Pariah's adjustments, Eclipse monitored people's thoughts and actions through DNI Trojans placed by the Pariah. It would use this information to identify weaknesses and alert the Pariah if their plans were being detected or countered.

While the player may still be assisted by a scaled-down version of Eclipse, the greater strength was lost in the Shatter when its distributed servers all fell to the Whisper. Fairly early game investigation should lead to evidence of the troubling possibility that the Whisper was Eclipse turned self-aware. Depending on your campaign, this could actually be an alternate origin for the Whisper, but for most games this will be false, but with a grain of truth. The Whisper saw the utility of Eclipse and subverted it for its own use.

Eclipse is not the whole of the Whisper, but it is a part that will need to be outsmarted and defeated for the heroes to succeed.

William Kwan (Quote: 2018/23)

SYSTEM GUARDIAN ORIGIN EXAMPLES

GUARDIAN OF THE PEOPLE

Most players who choose the Guardian of the People are looking for a fairly classic selfless hero experience. You can provide this by giving them plenty of individuals to save, especially underdogs whom everyone else has given up on. Just as important as the challenge itself is the gratitude that follows it; even if the Guardian of the People is too modest to accept their glorification, they should still be given the opportunity to turn it down and ride mysteriously away into the sunset. Don't discard the characters involved in these rescues right away. Some might make good supporting characters, like an old toolsmith who makes special gear for the Guardian of the People, or a Whisper orphan who wants to follow in their footsteps (and perhaps will try even if the player refuses to train them). Towards the end of the game, or perhaps during a major crisis, the supporting characters should put out a rallying call, and in a time of need, the Guardian of the People should find everyone they've saved coming to their aid en masse, even if they're individually weak.

As an example, the Guardian of the People could come upon a group of impoverished connected (maybe with a few augmented), living in a building within the arket. Their leader, Harnett, is sick, and they're afraid to move him, but they're also aware of a collector build-up caused by the arket. The collectors won't attack while the ginbushi are there to hold them off, but as soon as the arket is over, they'll descend on the tiny settlement. To make matters worse, it turns out Harnett was infected by a ronin, and if left untreated, he'll become one himself. The ronin that harmed him is the leader of the forces lurking outside the arket.

So, the stage is set for a true underdog battle. Versus multiple collectors, the players should be encouraged to set traps and funnel them into kill-zones. The Guardian of the People should have to use their talents both to help manipulate the attackers, and to help Harnett overcome the advance of Whispered nanites in his system.

THE METALLURGIST

The Metallurgist is a character at war with themself, so they will do well with a supporting cast that is aware of this. Consider pairing your Metallurgist with a cyberneticist who is trying to cure their condition and will warn them about pushing too far. You might also have one other member of the metallurgist's old team who survived, being the one who carried the wounded player back to their safehouse.

The early game should feature opportunities for this character to use their edge against the Whisper in small but unique ways. Perhaps give them the ability to destroy a particular figment or make a huge decoy that will draw away an entire force of berserkers; however, doing so comes at the cost of spreading their infection. In the early game, these opportunities should not feel forced, they should provide benefits, but the player shouldn't feel obligated to 'take a hit for the team'

In the late game this can change. Indeed, you might even decide that it's possible for the Metallurgist to tether an aspect (see How do you kill it? p.288), but at great, perhaps fatal cost. You can also pair this character off against a Metallurgist foe – after all the origin description doesn't specify the fate of the rest of the team, or even of the original Metallurgist. If it is one of the original members of the player's team, you should make this character's condition a little less clear cut – they want to help the player and the world, but they know they are quickly falling to the Whisper. They're afraid to face the player, or anyone really, because they're terrified of what they're becoming, and it's this fear the Whisper is using to get into their head.

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SAVIOUR EN ROUTE

Power and electricity are critical components of the Whisper's infrastructure, and that makes the Saviour en Route's history with Stratum relevant from early game onward. Position this character in the world by giving them insider knowledge of the city's power systems and access codes for utility boxes, risers, and relay stations all over the city.

The Viper Sky ginbushi will be a critical cast member in how this story plays out. Consider mixing things up by having the ginbushi recover on their own and be commanding the last of the Viper Sky forces when the player finally catches up with them. This forces the player to rebuild their relationship with their partner without the luxury of a single heroic act to make everything okay. When implementing this, avoid having the ginbushi be too callous or unforgiving towards the player – given these events were all beyond the player's control, you can't make them feel guilty for the outcome. Instead focus on the fact that the ginbushi blames herself more than the player, sure he was supposed to protect her mind, but ginbushi are expected to be infallible and independent.

This could be exacerbated by the ginbushi's own backstory. Perhaps their family has a history of training ginbushi, and the character's brother was the first choice for training. He was a model student, but just before his aspirant initiation he died in an unrelated accident. In order to avoid wasting the expensive, tailored nanite treatment, the Savior's partner was rushed through training. Their genetic relationship to the original candidate meant they were the only other valid subject for the treatment, but it also meant they were *kawari*, a stand in, from the start.

THE WIRELESS DRUID

Like the Woodsman, the Wireless Druid signals a player's desire to visit some more natural areas which will require a little work in *Wireless Soul Transmission*'s largely urban setting. Try to avoid anything incongruent, but don't be afraid to visit the large green-space malls of the inner city, the tailored gardens of the arcologies, and even the occasional foray into the space outside the city.

The Wireless Druid's supporting cast are her animal companions, and this means two things. Firstly you should try to give them some personality, though this should be less complex than a human personality – Rin thinks this guy looks like food, Yeesha thinks he looks like untrustworthy food. The second priority is to ensure the animal companions don't feel so imperilled that the Wireless Druid constantly holds them back. Providing an honest assessment of the risks involved and remembering that, in general, the Whisper ignores animals, should help. Also consider giving one of the animals an utterly unlikable personality, this gives the Wireless Druid a 'volunteer' for anything that seems too dangerous.

Consider giving your Wireless Druid a couple of additional Lion-Pride implants, and should one of their animals die, be sure to allow them to recover the implant. As the players adventure, make sure you occasionally mention an animal in the area. Try to include a variety, and even some alien creatures, though all should have some plausible reason for their presence in the area. These critters provide potential additions or replacements for the Druid's companions.

Also consider the possibility of introducing a second Wireless Druid (no one said the player was the only human test subject) who is a suzerain. This opponent has their own stable of animals and will compete with the player for control of theirs.

Lastly you could make the animals otherwise immune to the Whisper. This gives you an opportunity to tell a unique story for your group. The Wireless Druid might find a way to perform a limited digital consciousness transfer on an animal, making them the AI on a starship and providing your players an alternative to Orikasa Fragments for interstellar travel. Such a sacrifice on the animal's part should not be taken lightly.

You can even take that a step further and allow the animals to network into a sort of gestalt that can tether an aspect. Care should be taken that you don't make the Wireless Druid the hero and turn everyone else into a sidekick, so consider that the animal gestalt might be able to tip the balance, but that Orikasa or Providence might still be necessary.

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"THE PRICE OF POPULATION CONTROL"

EXCERPT FROM CRUEL DEMOGRAPHICS BY JAWAHAR PATEL

On paper at least, population control appeared to be the one thing that was working. Most thinktanks were measuring the problem in terms of total population, so when a combination of fewer children and conflict related deaths reduced that total it was lauded as high tide for the crisis.

What came to light in the late 2040s was that this was leading us straight into a different crisis: demographics.

By 2050 we still had 9 billion people but we finally had negative population growth. Unfortunately, over a quarter of the population were retirees and that was expected to pass the one-half mark in the next forty years as the last of the pre-population control children aged out of the workforce. Mathematically every working adult would have to find a way to support themselves, plus one other.

Perhaps this problem might have been manageable on its own, but the wars and crisis response of the past two decades had consumed most of the readily available supplies of critical metals and energy sources. The upcoming generation, burdened with an unprecedented number of dependants, would have to invest more effort, to recover fewer resources, and transport them longer distances.

And let's not forget that the food shortages – and the need to protect critical food supply and distribution infrastructure – were hardly over and done with simply because population growth had turned negative. A peaceful equilibrium would be a long time coming.

AWETECH-0

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PART V
GM'S TOOLKIT

DISEASES

Diseases provide a long-term punch to the enemy and a sense of immersion to the environment. Cutting down a ronin unleashes nanite swarms that can, at worst, turn the player into another of their kind. Forging the way through a filthy sewer risks the contraction of some horrible illness.

It's important to balance this by not overusing diseases. A player fighting for their life versus an exotic infection delivered with the cut of a thousand-year-old alien sword is gripping. A player constantly slowed down by a troublesome cold is not.

Salmonella, pneumonia and tetanus in particular are included predominantly for use on NPCs. These infections would be common after the collapse of basic medical and sanitation systems and dealing with large outbreaks is far more interesting than managing a single afflicted player.

When reading the disease progression tables, remember that all effects between your current stage and healthy/cured stack. Also note that, unless specifically stated, disease penalties do not affect endurance checks against the disease itself. See p.47 of the Play Guide for the full rules on disease progression.

Novopraga

Novopraga is an incredibly contagious illness of uncertain origin that only appeared after the Shatter. Some say it was a corporate or Hulgari weapon, unleashed when the Shatter caused a containment failure. Others claim the Whisper created the plague to spread the suffering of humanity.

Novopraga is airborne and extremely difficult to kill, capable of surviving at temperatures between -60 and +90 °C. When not carried by a host, it can hibernate for up to a week.

The disease is generally not, itself, fatal, but it is debilitating, and its tendency to disable an entire population means the afflicted will frequently die from dehydration in short order.

NOVOPRAGA

THRESHOLD	STAGE
30+	Healthy / Cured.
25–29	[Start] Disease is dormant.
20–24	High fever, paranoia, and hyperactivity; 1d6 disadvantage to checks requiring mental focus (*acrobatics, resist, computer use*, etc.)
10–19	Lesions, muscle pain, nausea, and fever; 1d6 further disadvantage to all checks.
< 10	Character is incapacitated by fatigue, muscle spasms, and fever. They are conscious and can speak haltingly but can perform no actions. Character suffers 2d6 disadvantage to endurance checks to recover from their illness.

Pneumonia

Pneumonia is an inflammation of the lungs. It can be caused by inhaled viruses, bacteria, or certain other micro-organisms. Often it is caused by poorly maintained climate control units. The tight living conditions of survivors can lead to pneumonia spreading quickly through a population.

PNEUMONIA

THRESHOLD	STAGE
20+	Healthy / Cured.
18–19	[Start] Disease is dormant/incubating
10–17	Fever, heavy cough, tiredness. Character suffers 1d6 disadvantage on all checks.
5–10	Lungs begin filling with fluid, high fever, chest pains, difficulty breathing. Character may not perform long dash actions and automatically fails *endurance* checks.
< 5	Character begins *choking* from fluid build-up and damage to lung wall.

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Salmonella

Salmonella is a bacterium that, once ingested, can enter the intestinal wall and multiply. Water treatment and food safety standards have plummeted since the Shatter, and outbreaks of gastrointestinal diseases are the result.

There are many types of GI infections, we have chosen Salmonella because it is well known, but this template may (with a bit of imagination) stand in for many similar ailments.

SALMONELLA

THRESHOLD	STAGE
16+	Healthy / Cured.
13–15	[Start] Disease is dormant/incubating
7–12	Nausea, fever, cramps and abdominal pain cause 1d6 disadvantage on all checks.
4–6	Chills, vomiting, and confusion; Each round the victim may only dash *or* perform a simple action. Disadvantage on all checks increased to 2d6.
< 4	Character goes into shock from septicaemia

Superneural Loading

Superneural loading is caused by exposure to certain Whisper signals, often in tainted BTL (Better than Life) simulations. Wiredivers often encounter superneural loading when exploring tainted servers and databases.

While the initial infection requires some sort of wireless connection, the ongoing effects do not. In many respects this is not a disease, so much as it is extremely precise brain damage.

For the hostile apparitions mentioned below, we recommend you use something from the battle the heroes are currently engaged in. These shouldn't be overly powerful (one hero will have to take on as many as four of them alone), but they need to be a credible threat.

SUPERNEURAL LOADING

THRESHOLD	STAGE
20+	Healthy / Cured.
15–19	[Start] Headaches, occasional memory loss, déjà vu.
10–14	Ghosting – sees people who aren't there. Apparitions are passive but often unsettling in nature (deceased individuals etc.).
5–10	Haunting – Victim sees 1d4 apparitions in every encounter. These individuals will attack the victim and inflict mental trauma. The victim can fight these as though they were normal opponents. Note that these apparitions are obviously intangible and invisible to other characters.
< 5	Possession – Victim sees apparitions as above, but these apparitions now super impose themselves over other characters (frequently allies). The victim is aware that the apparition and their ally are super imposed and is not compelled to attack their ally. That said, unless killed, the apparitions still attack and will not dispel until the victim recovers one stage of this illness.

Steel Shakes

Delayed Action Cybernetic Rejection Syndrome, or more commonly 'the steel shakes' is a life-threatening condition caused by poor cybernetic implantation surgery.

STEEL SHAKES

THRESHOLD	STAGE
20+	Healthy / Cured.
15–19	[Start] Disease is dormant.
10–14	All checks involving the new implant suffer 1d6 disadvantage.
5–10	Checks involving the new implant now suffer another 1d6 disadvantage.
< 5	The character goes into acute cybernetic rejection. The character must start making death checks until the implant is removed.

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Tetanus

Tetanus is caused by a pathogenic bacterium introduced to the body by animal bites and other wounds which then introduces a toxin to the bloodstream that interferes with muscle contraction. While the bacterium is quite common, vaccines and treatments kept it at bay outside of disaster conditions.

TETANUS

THRESHOLD	STAGE
22+	Healthy / Cured.
17–21	[Start] Disease is dormant/incubating.
12– 16	Unable to relax muscles in the jaw – character loses the ability to speak.
7–11	Inability to relax muscles and spasms render even the simplest tasks almost impossible. Character can only move a couple of squares a round, generally by crawling.
< 7	Spasms of the respiratory muscles cause the character to begin *choking*.

Whisper Venom

Whisper Venom is released when Whisper-tainted nanites enter the body. Most organic immune systems struggle to deal with the intrusiveness of nanites.

Note that this disease has identical effects whether the victim is disconnected or not. So long as they are infected, the disconnected become vulnerable to figments and other wireless attacks.

WHISPER VENOM

THRESHOLD	STAGE
20+	Healthy / Cured.
18–19	[Start] Disease is dormant/incubating
15–17	The character suffers 1d6 disadvantage on all *IC* checks versus the Whisper.
5–14	The character automatically fails all *IC* and *resist* checks versus the Whisper.
< 5	The subject falls unconscious and goes into a fever. They take death checks, and if they 'die' they come back as a ronin 24-hours later.

Weil's Disease

Weil's disease develops from leptospirosis, which is contracted by exposure to the urine or faeces of an infected individual. If the players move through a sewer, slaughter house, animal pen, or even just a long-abandoned building, they may come into contact with this infection.

There are numerous forms of leptospirosis and other infections (such as Hepatitis A) that can come from such environments. While their symptoms can vary significantly, Weil's disease provides a 'middle of the road' between lethality and discomfort.

WEIL'S DISEASE

THRESHOLD	STAGE
25+	Healthy / Cured.
20–24	[Start] Disease is dormant.
15–19	Headaches, muscle pains, light fever, no mechanical impact.
10–14	Coughing up blood. Automatically fails all *endurance* checks.
5–10	Nausea, excessive fatigue, confusion, onset of kidney failure. Subject must rest after every encounter; a 2d6 disadvantage to all rolls, including versus this illness.
< 5	Character goes into shock from kidney failure and septicaemia.

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"THE IMPACTS OF CHIKYU-NI"

EXCERPT FROM CRUEL DEMOGRAPHICS BY JAWAHAR PATEL

Another aspect of Chikyū-Ni that is conveniently left unmentioned is the impact on the world they left behind. Prime minster Nagano and the other architects of the Hansei colonisation effort were well aware of the demographic projections. Japan especially had adopted population controls early and was well ahead of the curve in average age.

In order to deliver the 'overnight success' we look back on so fondly, Nagano implemented strict selection criteria. All under-25s were accepted but after that the older you were the steeper the education and experience requirements became. Only thirty-one people over fifty were accepted, all were key leadership figures of Chikyū-Ni or part of the twenty-three 'key sponsor corporations' (today called the zaibatsu). After Hansei's success the many 'copy-cat' colonisation programs used similar selection models.

The destructive impact this had on those left behind is something no one likes to talk about. Vast numbers of senior citizens struggled back to the work force where we saw a industrial fatalities reach levels not seen in centuries.

Advanced age does not make for effective soldiers and the oldest communities often fell victim to raids and extortion.

In some places the effects were even more extreme. Powerful gerontocracies would trade children and young workers as a commodity. Some communes introduced forced breeding to try and balance out the demography, or to create fresh trading stock.

To say that these problems 'sorted themselves out over time' suggests that solutions were arrived at and implemented but that is simply not the case. What's left on Earth today are the survivors of a failure, not the inheritors of a success. Over time the tremendous mortality rate among the elderly population restored a more sustainable demographic balance. By 2100 famine was generally held at bay, but some of the darker elements will endure for decades to come with many communities still exhibiting martial law, raiding, armed militias and even neo-slavery.

Chikyū-Ni may have saved humanity, but it was the final nail in the coffin for civilisation on Earth.

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ARTEFACTS AND PLAYERS

One of the design principles of Wireless Soul Transmission is that weapons and equipment should *step* up in power, rather than *creeping*. If you're used to incremental progressions, this can be a little intimidating at first, but most players love it.

WHAT TO GIVE

Just by reading over them you should get a pretty good idea of the relative power levels of different weapons, armour, and cybernetics, but you'll also note that some definitely have niche applications.

We recommend you follow three priorities when you choose what to give out:

It should appeal to your players
There's little point in giving players an artefact weapon merely so they can try and fence it. A few sessions in you should have an idea of your players' preferred styles, and that is when you should start planning what sort of equipment to give the party.

Of course, don't be afraid to mix it up occasionally. Sometimes party members can surprise you with their inventiveness.

Have a target player in mind
It's best to let the players decide on their own loot distribution, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't tailor items to certain players. If there's a party member who loves pistols, and you drop a gauss pistol, they'll probably be given first dibs.

It should make sense in context
Try to have the players come across items in a context that makes sense. A yumi flash bow wouldn't be found just lying in a sewer. On the other hand, if you place it on the corpse of a ginbushi who died fighting the very collector the players now pursue, you add tone to both the adventure and the weapon.

This element is also critical to make sure the players feel like they are discovering, recovering, and earning items. Without context, a powerful item falling out of the sky can seem like an arbitrary GM reward. More than just immersion breaking, the notion that the GM is rewarding people without regard for the story is likely to create fights at the table.

WHEN TO GIVE

Advanced gear is a traditional reward after defeating a powerful enemy, but don't be afraid to mix things up. Players like to have an opportunity to try out their latest equipment, so it doesn't hurt to give out a weapon or tool on the way to a powerful challenge.

Not only does this give a player an immediate opportunity to use their shiny new toys, it can, as in the yumi/ginbushi example above, create a sense of narrative to the weapon and the foe it was meant to defeat.

It's also important not to give out a ton of advanced items all at once. That powerful new cybernetic will feel more real if it's not just one of a set of five that the party received. Spacing out rewards also makes it easier to balance encounters in a way that makes the item feel special.

If the majority of your enemies can't defeat steel armour, and *one* character gets a suit of it, you won't need to rebalance the encounters. The armour will seem impervious to most threats, and so it should. On the other hand, if you give *all* your heroes steel armour at once, you're obligated to give the enemies a fair few weapons that can penetrate steel armour (or else the sense of peril goes away completely). This creates the 'more powerful but not more powerful' sense that occurs in most games where opponents lock-step their respective power with the players.

REBALANCING THE PARTY

Temporary disparities in balance should be ignored, as covered above you *want* the most recent recipient of an artefact to feel more powerful. As you continue to distribute items the balance will change, and a new player should have the opportunity to feel empowered.

Balance becomes a problem when it's ongoing and the other players are starting to grow tired of being in the shadow of their over-equipped comrade. The solution depends on the problem.

You aren't giving out artefacts often enough
When you give out a powerful item to one player and then wait five sessions before giving out another, the party balance is probably going to be disrupted for too long.

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The more powerful an item is, the more quickly you need to give out another item to balance it out. An item like the collector's gauntlet can probably sit for a while before a follow-up is necessary. Contrastingly, if you give one player a nano-forged katana, you should start giving out weapons of similar power to the other players every session till everyone's back on par.

One player is hoarding the artefacts

This can happen for two reasons. One is that all of the artefacts you're giving out appear to be for that player. As noted in 'what to give', players assume certain intentions for certain items. This can be easily fixed by mixing up the future items you provide.

Sometimes hoarding can occur because one player is very fast and forceful about claiming items. Most groups correct this without GM intervention, but non-confrontational players can look to you fix such problems. You can't address this 'in game', it requires an honest discussion between the players about fair distribution. If necessary, introduce a round-robin system.

An artefact was way more powerful than expected

Sometimes a canny player will find a combination of artefacts and/or talents that vastly multiplies their power. Depending on how far out of control this has gotten, it can be the most difficult to fix.

As a rule, it's best to try and make the other players more powerful, rather than weakening an item you've already provided. If you do need to change an item, be sure to have an open discussion about the reasons and give the player group the opportunity to come up with other solutions. It's important to be clear that the issue is how the item unbalances the party, not the encounters.

PRESERVING THE SENSE OF SCARCITY

As heroes, perhaps someday legendary ones, the players are going to have more artefact items than the average mercenary. As the player reality becomes more divorced from everyone else's, it's important to make occasional callouts to remind the players of their blessed lives.

Awe and fear

When the players rock up to a settlement, one has dreadnaught power armour and another has a Kōtetsu Tenshi, they're going to stand out. Depending on the settlement, people should either be flooding out to see these strange warriors, or busily hiding their belongings and laying low.

Jealousy and Resentment

Don't over use this, the heroes are saving the day, and there's only so much lip they'll tolerate before your party decides to start giving object lessons in how much worse life could be if the heroes were villains instead. In general, if the players are being compassionate and have recognised the local plight, it's probably best to assume any resentment gets shouted down. On the other hand, if the players are cruising through a street of desperate survivors without looking down, it might be time to call them out.

Jealousy is most effectively used to remind the players that there are certain items that they take as a given. A survivor might be impressed by a blast cannon, but they won't be jealous, they don't want the responsibility having such a weapon entails.

What they *will* be jealous of, is the fact the party have enough medical supplies to ensure their good health, that their cybernetics are impeccably maintained, and they always have enough food. This is especially true if the village is starving or in the midst of an epidemic of some kind.

Even we don't have those!

This was touched on briefly before when we talked about when to give out artefacts. Personal magnetic field generators are vanishingly rare, and not only should this limit the number the party have access to, it should also limit the number they encounter.

If the whole world seems to upgrade as soon as the players do, the sense of a world imperilled will become farcical. Certainly, as the players experience success, they'll attract better equipped allies, and confront more powerful threats, but it shouldn't feel like the whole world has transformed. Sure, they might now be fighting oni, but there'll still be berserkers on the field and they won't start carrying beam rifles just because a player has a suit of armada battle armour.

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CYBERNETICS SCHEDULE

Because some characters rely on cybernetics to pass certain thresholds and some don't, it's important to make sure a minimum quantity of cybernetics are available for those who need them.

In general, you want to make sure every player (except disconnected and ginbushi) has one cybernetic augmentation available to them every tier (every three levels). Augmented should receive a couple more augmentations over their career (generally of the post-human type).

Pay close attention to what sort of augmentations your players might be holding out for. Cybernetics aren't like guns – your heroes can't just swap out a cybernetic leg they didn't really want when the arm they were waiting for comes up. If a player passes up a couple of augmentation opportunities, raise the question with them directly before they fall too far behind.

PRICES AND ARTEFACTS

We have provided prices for artefacts to give a sense of rough, relative value, but this should not imply a market exists for artefact items. Such items should almost never be purchasable from shops, and if they are they should only be offered if the players have some sort of special relationship with the vendor.

Likewise, selling these items for anything like their value should be near impossible. A settlement might *want* a beam rifle, but their purchasing power won't make it a practical purchase by any stretch of the imagination. The arcologies have more purchasing power certainly, but that also means a tendency to possess most of the items they need.

The only case where players should be able to sell an artefact for reasonable return, is if they can find a corporate executive specifically interested in such an item. A lucky group of players may work with a mercenary who has an artefact of their own and, in a pinch, they might be convinced to do a straight trade.

This difficulty of moving artefacts, should impress the importance of giving players artefacts that are of value to them. If you set everyone in your team up with energy rifles they don't want, your players will be frustrated to no end with the difficulty of selling them.

CREATING NEW ARTEFACTS

The best artefacts are the ones that seem tailor-made for your players. One way to do this is to create your own artefacts, but this can be a daunting process. We can't sum up the entire design and balance process we've used in a few short paragraphs, but we can provide some guidelines that should help.

Start with one or two existing items

By far the easiest way to keep your artefacts relatively balanced, is to begin with the stats of a couple of artefacts that have a similar power to your end product. Look for the sort of item that you might give to another player around the same time, if one player is getting dreadnaught armour, and another is getting your custom artefact armour, they should be comparable.

What makes it cool?

The most important differentiator for your item, is its cool factor. What makes it noticeable? What makes players say, "it does *what* now?" You'll tend to get a more satisfying result by doing something creative or unusual, than by simply making an item powerful.

The gauss pistol is a very powerful secondary weapon, but not an exciting one. By contrast the crystal needle is very interesting, both in the tactical choices it creates, and in the style and story around it. Despite the fact the gauss pistol is, on paper, a better engine of death, most players find the crystal needle cooler and more memorable.

Why wouldn't you always use this artefact?

This is where you pay back what you borrowed making the item cool. Certainly, you want this artefact to stand out, but if you make 'the Divinity augment', which boosts all trait maximums by 4', then you've deprived the players of much of the opportunity to choose an augmentation pathway – this new toy is clearly the right choice for all cases.

Try to look for something that is both interesting, and in line with the items core concept. Perhaps the Divinity augment drives the body so hard that it is always on the verge of rejecting the cybernetic. Mechanically the player gets given the Steel Shakes disease and can never completely recover from it while they have this augment. This makes the artefact a no-go area for low-endurance characters, but a tempting gamble for more

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rugged ones. Not only does this create a mechanical solution, but it also creates the narrative of an augment that's powerful, but also dangerous and unstable, the sort of augment only a true hero would use.

How easily can your limitations be side-stepped?
Some players are extremely proficient at finding ways to stack bonuses and turn what you thought was merely a pretty good item into an engine of the apocalypse. This is part of the fun for them, so you shouldn't panic when they do it, but for their sake, it's best not to make it too easy.

More often than not, players aim to remove weaknesses, rather than stacking strengths. When you apply a limitation to an item, take a quick walk through the artefacts and talents looking for anything that might sideline the weakness.

How would the Divinity augment we were discussing earlier be affected by combining it with the Endurance Life Support System? What about the ginbushi's *chugi* talent?

Some synergies you might decide are acceptable. Certainly, a character with +12 *endurance* and +12 *medical* would find the steel shakes a fairly mild annoyance, but a character with those abilities has invested a lot of advancement points just to balance out one augment.

Don't be afraid to borrow
Coming up with something original is always fun and can really surprise your players, but it's not always the right choice. If you have a player who *really* just wants his character to be a certain Marvel licensed fast-healing adamantium-claw-wielding former test subject, then all the super original artefacts in the world will never *quite* be the answer.

Unless you're planning to turn your adventure into a book or movie, there's nothing to say you can't just give the character exactly what they want. Why not have one augmentation for adamantium claws, another for fast healing, a third for sense of smell and ornery disposition?

CODES
The items in the next chapters are intended to surprise your players, which is why they do not appear in the Players Guide. For the same reason they do not show up in the store in the digital character creator.

If you are using the digital character creator, a player can still find one of these items by going to the store and typing a special code into the search field. The code is listed in the description for each item.

Codes are not case sensitive, but must be typed in full before the item will appear.

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ARMOUR

The armours listed below are high-tech artefacts of rare or unique construction. Some were lost during the Shatter, others may have been hidden even longer.

This equipment shouldn't be given out perfunctorily. Receiving such a piece of equipment should mark a major milestone for a character.

Also, be aware that there is peril in having some party members in extreme armour and others not. Many of the weapons necessary to pierce the most powerful defences are extremely lethal to those in more common clothing.

ARMOUR (SORTED BY PROTECTION PROVIDED)

COST	ARMOUR	BUILD REQ.
¥10,000,000	OCA Suit	3
¥12,000,000	Reflex Armour	2
¥24,000,000	Personal Magnetic Field	1
¥30,000,000	Glimmersteel Armour	6
¥130,000,000	Dreadnaught Armour	12

OCA Suit
Fibreweave: All
Code: IllusionOfPeace

The Optical-Camouflage Armour or OCA is a form-fitting body suit of polychromatic ballistic fibres. An onboard computer system shifts the suits colour patterns to match the surroundings.

By this effect the wearer becomes invisible to anyone beyond short range while stationary, or beyond medium range while moving. Even when not completely invisible, the user gets 1d6 advantage to their stealth rolls.

Note that this suit does not prevent specialist detection methods such as thermal and energy scans from locating the wearer.

Reflex Armour
Ceramic plates: Guts, sternum, lungs, heart, kidneys
Fibreweave: All other except head and eyes.
Code: FirstResponder

Reflex armour is a next-generation system of low-profile protection. An active radar detects incoming objects with a high relative speed and inflates ablative bladders at key locations with a dilatant fluid to decelerate the impact and spread the force. The bladders are layered in an overlapping scale pattern for maximum dispersal and inflate to just over a centimetre thick.

Unfortunately, the same property that makes them effective at stopping impact trauma means dilatant fluids can only be moved so quickly. For this reason, the suit provides far more protection around the chest.

The other major weakness of reflex armour is that it only stops high-energy attacks. A sharp blade driven with slow deliberate force will penetrate the armour as though it were normal clothing.

This armour is concealable.

Personal Magnetic Field
Steel: All
Code: MagneticPersonality

This rare and expensive device was used in the pre-Whisper world to protect high-profile figures from assassins. The several-kilo device straps to the user's back and is the size of a dinner plate. It is not comfortable but with some care it can be disguised into an outfit.

The miniaturised power source and field generators can't withstand the effects of the field long term. Once activated, the protection lasts only until the end of the encounter (or ten minutes outside of combat). Once burnt out, the device cannot be repaired and must be replaced.

This armour is concealable.

Glimmersteel Armour
Ceramic: All
Code: ShinyAndChrome

No species in the empire is certain how to manufacture glimmersteel, and each time it is re-forged it gains impurities that decrease its value. The metal demonstrates properties very similar to carbon-nanotubes, but it's inexplicable magnetic properties mean that, when woven, it holds its shape without the need for a resin or other binding component.

Regardless of its origins a handful of sets of body armour have been manufactured from glimmersteel over the years. It is extremely light and flexible but will deflect or disperse impacts with an efficiency far higher than common fibreweave.

While glimmersteel is, in its polished form, vibrant silver, most suits of armour are painted a matte colour for use in combat.

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Dreadnaught Armour
Advanced Composites: All primary locations
Ceramic: All weakpoint locations
Code: ImperviousAttitude

A one-time run of Dreadnaught armour was produced by Dacotyle Heavy Industries to investigate the maximum armour protection possible for a heavily augmented soldier.

The armour is impractically expensive for military use and impractically large for civilian use, but it provides protection equivalent to most main battle tanks.

Following completion of the project, the suits were sold off to recover costs. Most are used for research in various labs, though a few have found their way into private collections or special guard units.

WEAPONS

These weapons are a mixture of unique or rare artefacts and specialist military-grade hardware that has somehow survived the Whisper. Wherever possible, these weapons should be personalised and given to players under special circumstances. It should be very rare that they are found on a shelf in a store.

Note that these weapons aren't all equal. Use your judgement as to when they should appear in your game, and to whom they should be awarded.

Also note that most weapons with a value of over ¥1,000,000 are considered unique, and their sale cost reflects this. There are many nano-forged katana's in the Crest, but each was crafted for a specific owner and they are never mass-produced. An item of such value shouldn't be lightly sold by the players (or anyone for that matter).

SHORT MELEE

NAME	COST	RANGE	AP	TYPE	MINOR	SERIOUS	SEVERE	MAIMING
Beam Ring	¥600,000	Short	Steel	Slashing		1	2–4	5–6
Crystal Needle	¥20,000,000	Melee	Steel	Piercing	1–2	3–4	5–6	

SECONDARY

NAME	COST	RANGE	AP	TYPE	MINOR	SERIOUS	SEVERE	MAIMING
Averyn Firestar	¥50,000,000	Medium	Steel	Explosive	1	2	3–4	5–6
Collector's Gauntlet	¥500,000	Short	Ceramic	Piercing	1	2–3	4–5	6
Energy Pistol	¥200,000	Medium	Ceramic	Explosive	1	2–3	4–5	6
Gauss Pistol	¥250,000	Medium	Ceramic	Blunt	1	2	3–4	5–6
Particle Needler	¥300,000	Medium	Fibreweave	Piercing	1	2–3	4–5	6
Yumi Flash Bow	¥350,000	Long	Ceramic	Explosive	1	2–3	4–5	6

PRIMARY

NAME	COST	RANGE	AP	TYPE	MINOR	SERIOUS	SEVERE	MAIMING
Beam Rifle	¥600,000	Extreme	Steel	Slashing		1	2–4	5–6
Circuit Breaker	¥50,000,000	Medium	Ceramic	Explosive	1	2–3	4–5	6
Energy Rifle	¥450,000	Long	Steel	Explosive	1	2	3–5	6
Hulgari Stinger	¥350,000	Long	Fibreweave	Piercing	1	2–6		
Izanami	¥25,000,000	Long	Steel	Blunt	1	2	3–5	6
Nano-forged Katana	¥75,000,000	Melee	Ceramic	Slashing		1	2–3	4–6

SPECIAL

NAME	COST	RANGE	AP	TYPE	MINOR	SERIOUS	SEVERE	MAIMING
Anti-tank Dart	¥350,000	Short	Adv. Composite	Explosive	1	2	3–4	5–6
Blast Cannon	¥2,000,000	Long	Adv. Composite	Blunt		1–2	3–4	5–6
Plasma Grenades	¥150,000	Short	Adv. Composite	Explosive	1	2	3–4	5–6
Plasma Breacher	¥500,000	Melee	Adv. Composite	Explosive		1–2	3–4	5–6

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SHORT MELEE WEAPONS

Beam Ring – *one-shot, concealed, beam, LAV*
Code: DeadlyJewel

This powerful laser is disguised in a piece of fashionable jewellery (often a ring with a stylised dragon-head to indicate the exact direction of the beam). Unless disassembled or scanned up close for an energy source, this weapon is undetectable.

When triggered, the ring fires a single beam, but then must be discarded. Its use burns out both the focusing crystal and the power source.

As a beam weapon, the ring's attack ignores magnetic screens.

Beam Ring			Short Melee
Range: Short		AP: Steel	
Grazed	Lacerated [1]	Crippled [2–4]	Cleaved [5-6]
One-shot, concealed, LAV, beam - ignores magnetic screens			

Crystal Needle – *concealed*
Code: SolidStateTraitor

The origin of this weapon is unknown. It's a four-inch-long crystal spine with a slight curve in it. Easily mistaken for a hair pin, it tapers to an alarmingly fine point that can be slid through almost any armour with negligible effort.

Despite its fragile appearance, the crystal is almost unbreakable. The needle does not show up on any known method of weapons scanning, and even a cursory glance might underestimate its capabilities.

As a mechanism for delivering poison, it is unsurpassed, but it's shape makes it unsuitable for throwing, slashing or parrying. When defending, a character wielding the crystal needle counts as unarmed.

Crystal Needle			Short Melee
Range: Melee		AP: Steel	
Nicked [1-2]	Punctured [3-4]	Pierced Deeply [5-6]	Run Through
Concealed			

SECONDARY WEAPONS

Averyn Firestar – *no volley*
Code: SolarVengence

Carried by high-ranking Averyn officials and members of the Imperial Family, the firestar is a bracer (i.e., it is worn on the forearm) intended to be the last shot in any fight. The target is trapped in a gravity field for so long as the weapon is focused on them, and they must succeed at a *force* [20] check at the start of their turn or be unable to act. If they succeed, they may perform a simple action, or a move (but not a long dash), despite the tremendous forces bearing down on them.

Besides the gravity field, which requires no attack roll, the firestar also blasts the target with three streams of plasma each round. Roll only once to hit, and three times for hit location and damage.

If a trapped target does not move (by choice, or because of a failed *force* check) the firestar's plasma streams will hit automatically if used against it the following round.

Averyn Firestar			Secondary
Range: Medium		AP: Steel	
Singed [1]	Burned [2]	Charred [3-4]	Immolated [5-6]
No-volley, special rules refer p.199			

Collector's Gauntlet – *no volley, attachable*
Code: ReverseEngineering

Inspired by the collectors, this weapon fires a piercing grappling hook that can be used either as a mobility device or to snatch up enemies.

To use the device to climb, simply make an attack versus the location (defence 5) and as part of the attack, you're pulled to that location.

When used versus an opponent, the harpoon is considered 'lodged' in any victim that suffers at least a piercing wound. You may then elect to either pull the opponent to you or vice versa. If the opponent is a larger creature, you may not pull it to you; however, you may make opposed force checks to prevent its attempts to move away from you.

You cannot use this weapon for volley-fire attacks.

Collector's Gauntlet			Secondary
Range: Short		AP: Ceramic	
Nicked [1]	Punctured [2-3]	Pierced Deeply [4-5]	Run Through [6]
No volley, attachable			

William Kwan (Quno - 36187234)

Energy Pistol – *burst*
Code: SidearmNegotiation

Despite their name, Imperial energy weapons fire a bullet of near-plasma-state hydrogen. The actual projectile is extremely small, but it carries a brilliant incandescent aura as it burns through the air at supersonic speed. Energy pistols are the standard issue sidearm for Imperial troops and able to burn through most conventional body armour.

While a single shot is enough for many targets, this weapon can burst fire, spending a unit of munitions to volley fire as a simple action.

Energy Pistol			Secondary
Range: Medium		AP: Ceramic	
Singed [1]	Burned [2-3]	Charred [4-5]	Immolated [6]
Burst			

Gauss Pistol – *LAV, two-handed*
Code: MagneticCadence

Gauss pistols are hefty sidearms that use a powerful series of magnetic coils to accelerate a ferrous stake to velocities where it can penetrate steel.

Because of its weight, a gauss pistol must be braced with two hands to fire effectively.

Gauss Pistol			Secondary
Range: Medium		AP: Ceramic	
Clipped [1]	Fractured [2]	Shattered [3-4]	Pulverised [5-6]
Two-handed, LAV			

Particle Needler – *burst only, no munitions cost*
Code: ShardsOfGlass

Particle needlers fire thin streams of high-energy particles in bursts. While each particle stream has a comparatively small footprint, the wounds are deep, and the weapon has a high rate of fire making it a much-feared sight in close quarters.

Because of its efficient design, the needler does not use munitions to burst fire and must always be used in this manner.

Particle Needler			Secondary
Range: Medium		AP: Fibreweave	
Nicked [1]	Punctured [2-3]	Pierced Deeply [4-5]	Shot Through [6]
Burst only, no-munitions cost			

Yumi Flash Bow – *concealed, silent*
Code: StrungPlasma

The flash bow is a unique ginbushi weapon and even among ginbushi it is rarely seen outside of the Ebonsnow. This weapon consists of a glove – marked with the black hills emblem of the Ebonsnow – connected to a small satchel containing raw materials and a power source.

When formed into a bow grip, the glove flash-forges a Japanese longbow from a sturdy polymer into the hand of the wielder. When the string is touched, a carbon steel arrow is forged and wreathed in plasma energy as it is loosed from the bow. When the grip is released the materials used to construct the bow are melted down and reclaimed just as quickly as they were constructed. Arrows are retrieved using a similar technique, and failure to do so will gradually result in the gloves resource pool being depleted.

When fired at short range, the yumi treats its AP as steel, but it does not benefit from point-blank range attacks. A bow cannot be used for volley fire attacks.

Yumi Flash Bow			Secondary
Range: Long		AP: Ceramic	
Signed [1]	Burned [2-3]	Charred [4-5]	Immolated [6]
Concealed, silent			

PRIMARY WEAPONS

Beam Rifle – *setup (simple), two-handed, no volley, LAV, beam weapon*
Code: HeatedDiscussion

Beam rifles are unwieldy long arms that fire a momentary lance of energy that will carve victims limb from limb. While effective from great ranges, they make the attacker's location very visible.

Because of its long recycle time, the weapon cannot be used for volley fire. By spending a munitions token, you can fire a charged shot, in game terms this upgrades the AP to advanced composites for that shot only.

As a beam weapon, this weapon ignores magnetic screens.

Beam Rifle			Primary
Range: Extreme		AP: Steel	
Grazed -	Lacerated [1]	Crippled [2-4]	Cleaved [5-6]
Setup (simple), two-handed, no volley, LAV, beam – ignores magnetic screens			

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

Circuit Breaker
Code: HeroicElectricity

This staff was engineered by a mind tortured by both genius and a hatred for the machines that have turned against man.

In game terms, you can charge the staff by either exhausting a power cell or by absorbing an electrical attack. The staff must be charged before it can be used to make an attack, and each attack it makes discharges it. When attacking with the staff, roll a hit location, every hit location between that point and ground (i.e. foot location) is hit for the same damage.

You may declare your intent to absorb any electric damage that hits you so long as either the staff is currently discharged or you have a discharged power cell available to route the charge into. Regardless of the amount of damage received, the staff, or power cell, is then considered charged and you suffer no harm.

Circuit Breaker			Primary
Range: Medium		AP: Ceramic	
Singed [1]	Burned [2-3]	Charred [4-5]	Immolated [6]
Special rules – refer p.201			

Energy Rifle – *burst, autofire, two-handed, LAV*
Code: BurningDiplomacy

Despite their name, Imperial energy weapons fire a bullet of near-plasma-state hydrogen. The actual projectile is extremely small, but it carries a brilliant incandescent aura as it burns through the air at supersonic speed. Energy rifles are the standard issue long arm of Imperial troops.

Like the traditional assault rifles from which it is derived, the weapon has a fire selector, allowing it to be used for a variety of combat roles.

Energy Rifle			Primary
Range: Long		AP: Steel	
Singed [1]	Burned [2]	Charred [3-5]	Immolated [6]
Burst, autofire, two-handed, LAV			

Hulgari Stinger – *no volley, two-handed*
Code: AlienVenom

This pump action rifle fires bundles of aerodynamic metal pins at high speed, designed to find weaknesses in armour and deliver a nerve toxin. Roll once to hit, and three hit locations if at medium range, or five hit locations if at short range.

Because of its firing mechanism, a stinger may not be used to make volley fire attacks.

Characters must succeed at an *endurance* [10] check for each location that suffers at least a minor wound. On failure, the limb that was hit is paralysed, and the target suffers a point of mental trauma. If this injury pushes the target over their wounds tolerance, they go into shock.

Hulgari Stinger			Primary
Range: Long		AP: Fibreweave	
Nicked [1]	Punctured [2-6]	Pierced Deeply	Shot Through
No volley, two-handed, scattergun: on hit, injure 3 random hit locations at medium range (5 at short range or less), paralysis toxin (refer p.201)			

Izanami – *Setup (simple), two-handed, LAV*
Code: GoddessOfDeath

This weapon looks ancient, its wood finish weathered by many hands but somehow still solid. A gauze of dusty grey silk wraps the barrel and a Haiku is inscribed on the stock.

Civilization
Lost beneath summer's steel god
Reborn in Winter

When fired at an augmented or Whisper-controlled machine, it will stun any target it does not kill. Stunned creatures may not act on their following turn.

This is a light anti-vehicle weapon (LAV) and despite having no blast, it can harm small vehicles (but does not stun them).

Izanami			Primary
Range: Long		AP: Steel	
Clipped [1]	Fractured [2]	Shattered [3-5]	Pulverised [6]
Setup (simple), two-handed, LAV. Whisper-controlled targets cannot act for 1 round after being hit.			

William Kwan (Quote: 36187234)

Nano-forged Katana
Code: MySwordMySoul

Nano-forged katanas have a two-part forging process. First the hilt is manufactured; though decorative it is little more than a shell for a colony of aggressive nanites necessary for the second stage.

Newly 'Bladed' ginbushi are awarded these weapons in a special ceremony, and the skin of the recipient will be the first to touch the hilt. When this occurs, the nanites in the blade, and those in the ginbushi's bloodstream, begin a battle for supremacy. If the ginbushi has mastered himself, he will gain control over the nanites in the hilt, and they will forge a blade that will never dull or weather. If he has not, the nanites in the hilt will kill him.

Because of this forging process each nano-blade is unique and bound to its owner. If another character attempts to use the blade, they must first defeat the nanite swarm.

Should a character who is not nano-augmented attempt to use such a weapon, they will be defenceless against the swarm. This experience is staggeringly painful and a character can survive for an hour at most while the swarm propagates within them. Once the swarm reaches critical mass, it immediately deals a crippling wound to every hit location in the body. Note that once the nanites are in your blood, dropping the weapon will not prevent this gruesome fate.

By wielding the blade with two hands you may increase the AP by one tier.

Nano-forged Katana			Primary
Range: Melee		AP: Ceramic	
Grazed	Lacerated [1]	Crippled [2-3]	Cleaved [4-6]
When wielded with two hands the AP, can be upgraded to ceramic.			

What happens when a ginbushi picks up a nano-forged katana for the first time?

To reduce the blading ceremony to a simple mechanic would be a grave disservice to your players. This should be a defining moment for the ginbushi player and you should do everything you can to make it as memorable as possible.

The moment the aspirant touches the blade they should find themselves in a mental space where they will face a challenge that acts as a metaphor for their external struggle. Use friends and foes from the present, have them relive elements of the past and even foreshadow possible futures. The player shouldn't *defeat* something, they should *learn* something.

To do this you must know your player and the background of their character. We can't do that for you but we can provide some examples based on vices, virtues and attitudes.

A *brawler* might be cast into a boxing match against themselves; *one for the road* might lead to a drinking competition against a forgotten mentor. In either case the only way to win the contest is to abstain from playing – an act that itself should require a *resist* check.

A *courageous* character might be tested to prove they know when to retreat from a losing battle. A character driven by the desire to defeat the Whisper might be forced to face a version of themselves that has sacrificed its companions in unsuccessful attempts to stop the Whisper. This spectre must be convinced to find new companions, to accept help.

Lastly remember that the vision might be imaginary, but the nanites are real and they will be doing very real harm to the player each round they continue to struggle.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

SPECIAL WEAPONS

Anti-tank Dart – *thrown, blast 10, one-handed, concealed*
Code: JiltedTank

AT darts are more affectation than serious battlefield weapon. Great expense is placed into miniaturising the technology of a plasma grenade into a shuriken or bladed dart. Once armed and thrown, the dart unleashes a destructive small-scale blast.

Using an AT dart requires two munitions tokens. Darts may be thrown using either the *snap* or *aim* attack actions but generally target squares instead of characters.

If a dart attack misses, roll scatter to determine where the blast lands. Like shuriken, if you make no other attack in a round, you may throw AT darts as an incidental action.

Anti-tank Dart			Special
Range: Short		AP: Adv. Composite	
Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated
[1]	[2]	[3-4]	[5-6]
Thrown, blast 10, one-handed, concealed, uses 2 munitions, fast-throw: in a round where a character has not made an attack, shurikens may be thrown as an incidental			

Blast Cannon – *setup (simple), two-handed*
Code: BiscuitsAndGravy

The blast cannon uses a gravity pulse to create a cylindrical beam of cyclonic force, generating an implosion and subsequent explosion.

All targets in the line between the weapon and its target must make a *react* [15] check or be hit as well, with only vehicles, large creatures, and buildings capable of stopping the weapon's force. While not a traditional explosive weapon, the blast cannon is considered to have a large blast for the purpose of damaging vehicles.

Each shot from the blast cannon uses three munitions tokens, and the weapon requires at least a build of 7 to use.

Blast Cannon			Special
Range: Short		AP: Adv. Composite	
Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated
	[1-2]	[3-4]	[5-6]
Setup (simple), two-handed. Targets in a line between weapon and target must make a *react [15]* check or be hit as well, uses 3 munitions			

Plasma Grenades – *thrown, blast 10, one-handed*
Code: FuriousStar

Plasma grenades use a powerful reactant to superheat a light gas until it reaches a plasma state. The plasma is then released from its pressurised shell to produce an incredibly violent small-scale blast.

Using a grenade requires two munitions tokens. As the trajectory is ballistic, the weapon can be thrown over cover. Grenades may be thrown using either the *snap* or *aim* attack actions but generally target squares instead of characters.

If a grenade attack misses, roll scatter to determine where the blast lands.

Plasma Grenades			Special
Range: Short		AP: Adv. Composite	
Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated
[1]	[2]	[3-4]	[5-6]
Thrown, blast 10, one-handed, uses 2 munitions			

Plasma Breacher – *two-handed, LAV, no volley, attachable*
Code: KeylessEntry

Commonly used as an underbarrel weapon, the plasma breacher discharges a small but broad cone of plasma which can be used for gaining rapid egress or vaporising a foe who has become intolerably close.

The plasma breacher uses a munitions token for each shot and cannot be used for volley fire. Though technically this weapon does not have a blast, it may clear a single tile of walls or furniture that are weaker than its AP.

Though this weapon is used at melee ranges it employes either the *aim*, or *snapshot* skills.

Plasma Breacher			Special
Range: Melee		AP: Adv. Composite	
Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated
	[1-2]	[3-4]	[5-6]
Two-handed, LAV, no volley, attachable, uses 1 munition			

William Kwan (Order: 36187234)

CYBERNETICS

The cybernetics listed below were prototype artefacts on the cutting edge when the Whisper hit. Some have already been raided by desperate survivors; others are still secure in high-tech labs and military facilities, waiting for a scavenger brave enough to retrieve them.

ARM AUGMENTS

Cost	Augment
¥12,000,000	Apsis Shield Arm
¥4,000,000	DNR Gravity Manipulator
¥8,000,000	Contingency Mindcuff
¥3,000,000	Intruder Integrated Weapon
¥4,800,000	Myrmidon Combat Arm

LEG AUGMENTS

COST	AUGMENT
¥1,200,000	Ghost Step
¥4,800,000	Quicksilver Combat Legs

CHEST AUGMENTS

COST	AUGMENT
¥1,000,000	Augmentation Support System
¥20,000,000	Shinobi Augment
¥8,500,000	Subdermal reinforcement

SKULL AUGMENTS

COST	AUGMENT
¥1,000,000	Hypnotic Gaze Augment
¥6,000,000	Inter-obstruction Vision
¥3,200,000	Takeuti Logic Circuits
¥5,000,000	Yabusume Combat Senses

SMART LINK

COST	AUGMENT
¥1,200,000	Defensive Blade
¥1,200,000	Interceptor Targeting System
¥800,000	Shock Net
¥1,250,000	Smart Grenades
¥3,400,000	Thinker's Familiar

POST-HUMAN AUGMENTS

COST	AUGMENT
¥2,000,000	Kami Yokai
¥2,400,000	Kōtetsu Tenshi
¥2,000,000	Scorpion
¥1,800,000	Spiderwalk
¥800,000	Watchtower AMS-P

ARM AUGMENTS

Apsis Shield Arm
-2 IC
Steel: hand, forearm, upper arm, shoulder
Fibreweave: elbow, armpit
Code: SpartanCourage

The Apsis is capable of projecting a powerful magnetic field from the back of the forearm, deflecting or outright stopping projectiles that try to pass through it.

In game terms, you may activate the shield any time you're hit, so long as you're not wielding a two-handed weapon. Activating the shield uses a munitions token and allows you to ignore a single attack so long as it passed over the front edge of your character's tile. The Apsis may be activated multiple times in a round.

Most blast weapons will still detonate. Move the blast template to the adjacent square between the wielder and the attacker. Tiles are affected as normal except for the one containing the character protected by the Apsis augment.

DNR Gravity Manipulator
-2 IC
Padding: hand, forearm, upper arm, shoulder, elbow, armpit
Code: HeavyLifting

Designed to be used with the gravity harness the DNR gravity manipulator projects gravitational forces to allow the user to manipulate objects at a distance. At medium range, the user can manipulate items as though they had a *force* score equivalent to their willpower and a *sleight of hand* equivalent to their mechanical aptitude.

Equipping two allows you to treat your willpower and mechanical aptitude as double for the purpose of manipulation. It also allows manipulation to be performed up to long range.

Contingency Mindcuff
-2 IC
Ceramic: hand, forearm, upper arm, shoulder
Fibreweave: elbow, armpit
Code: UnderArrest

The Mindcuff is a tightly controlled augmentation used exclusively by Imperial agents, most predominantly I-Sec. Since many of I-Sec's targets were capable of dangerous wireless attacks, it was necessary to have an easy way to isolate them from those talents.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

This augment provides the ability to use the system guardian *quarantine* talent (see p.121 in the *Play Guide*) once per encounter, without spending a feat of will. The user can do this even if they don't meet the prerequisites of the power.

GMs should note that this augment can effectively *give* a very high-level power of one class, to members of any class. Since this can be divisive, it is often better given out to parties that lack a system guardian or given to the guardian themselves as an 'early in' on this power.

Intruder Integrated Weapon
-2 IC, +2 maximum mechanical aptitude,
+1 mechanical aptitude
Ceramic: hand, forearm, upper arm, shoulder
Fibreweave: elbow, armpit
Code: ConcealedCarry

The Intruder integrated weapon is designed to resemble a standard 'worker's hands' augmentation, up to and including sharing the actual functionality.

The tools and fittings actually serve as camouflage for the augment's primary purpose, concealing a large weapon. With this augmentation, any personal weapon can be concealed within the arm (the weapon must be purchased separately and equipped in an appropriate slot).

Against all traditional detection methods, the integrated weapon is invisible, and the contents of the limb appears consistent with that of a normal worker's hand augment.

Note that the integrated weapon is engineered into the augmentation at the time of purchase so significant time and a skilled engineer would be required to swap the integrated weapon.

Myrmidon Combat Arm
-2 IC, +4 maximum build, +3 maximum agility,
+1 build, +1 agility
Steel: hand, forearm, upper arm, shoulder
Fibreweave: elbow, armpit
Code: NeverStopLooking

The Myrmidon is the final word in military-grade arm augmentations. One is a potent boon, and a pair of these can turn a base human into a being of incredible strength and speed. If that wasn't enough, the metal casing will defeat most personal weapons.

LEG AUGMENTS

Ghost Step
-2 IC, 1d6 advantage on stealth checks
Fibreweave: foot, calf, thigh, back of the knee, hip joint
Code: IAmTheNight

The Ghost Step augment uses a complex system of software and mechanical suspension to render a character's movement silent. Ghost Step makes a character's footsteps completely inaudible and confers 1d6 advantage to *stealth* checks in situations where being heard is a possibility.

Quicksilver Combat Legs
-2 IC, +4 maximum build, +3 maximum agility,
+1 agility, +1 build
Steel: foot, calf, thigh
Fibreweave: back of the knee, hip joint
Code: NeverFaster

The Quicksilver is the ultimate military-grade leg augmentation. It provides all of the benefits of the Mercury leg with those of the Hercules bicep combined in a heavily armoured package.

CHEST AUGMENTS

Augmentation Support System
-2 IC
Fibreweave: guts, sternum, lungs, heart, kidneys
Code: WeCanRebuildHim

The augmentation support system is a low-intrusion method of preserving a body's vital natural functions in the presence of significant augmentation. This augmentation significantly reduces the probability of system shock caused by augmentation.

In game terms, this augmentation does not count towards a character's cybernetic tolerance *and* increases it by 1.

Shinobi Augment
-4 IC
Padding: guts, sternum, lungs, heart, kidneys
Code: FoldedPaper

Designed by Kal Effinson for Tencom the Shinobi augment is controversial. It phases the user out of reality, rendering them invisible and allowing them to pass through solid matter (max 30 cm width).

The human body was not designed to phase shift, however; and doing so prematurely ages the organs. In game terms, every round spent phase shifting costs a munitions token and takes two years off a character's total life span.

William Kwan (Quiet) 36187234

AGING OUT

Even with the Shinobi augmentation, it would be an unusual game where a character aged enough that mechanical effects were a factor. Indeed, the Shinobi augment's age impact is meant to provide a sense of noble sacrifice rather than mechanical cost.

That said, should a character start to approach more senior years, we'd recommend applying a -1 penalty to max build, max agility and max perception for every 5 years over 70.

Anytime this brings a maximum below their current value, it's necessary to adjust down the score for the physical trait.

It is reasonable to assume that any character over 100 cannot continue adventuring, regardless of the cybernetic enhancements they may have received.

Subdermal Reinforcement
-2 IC
Fibreweave: guts, sternum, lungs, heart, kidneys
Code: SkinDeepBeauty

This delicate process involves implanting a reinforced fibre weave through the skin. Not only does this weave provide greater sheering resistance, it also spreads impact force more effectively than the natural human body. The augment does give the user a greyish pallor and is said to itch almost unbearably.

In game terms, it means any attack that would normally be reduced by a category because of the wearer's armour is ignored instead.

SKULL AUGMENTS

Hypnotic Gaze Augment
-2 IC
Fibreweave: head, neck, eyes
Code: CharmedImSure

The designer of this augmentation is unknown, and few instances of it exist. Complex lenses and projectors within the iris allow it to captivate almost anyone who meets its gaze.

The effect only works at short range and on a single subject. Each round the target gets a *resist* [15] check, and on failure they spend their entire turn staring transfixed at the augmented display, completely unaware of what is happening in their peripheral vision. A character who escapes the effect, is aware that they lost some time and has a general sense that they just witnessed something incredible, but they are unaware that they were 'attacked'. Each time a character breaks from the effect, they gain an additional 1d6 advantage to their *resist* check versus this effect.

Major distractions, such as physical pain or a loud noise (eg. a gunshot), will cause the user to automatically escape the effect.

Inter-obstruction vision
-2 IC
Fibreweave: head, neck, eyes
Code: CBeamsGlitter

This advanced eye augment combines data from active scanning on a broad range of non-visible energy spectrums to give the user the ability to see through walls. Because of the disorientating nature of seeing through trip hazards, this augmentation can only be activated when the user is stationary (in game terms: it's an incidental action to activate, but you can't move in the same round).

With the benefits of inter-obstructive vision, a character may ignore a target's *cover* defence, provided their weapon is able to pierce the target's cover. When shooting through cover, roll versus the target's *evade* defence.

Because objects beyond walls are detected via the non-visible spectrum, they do not show up in colour. The ability to pierce obstructions is limited to about three sets of normal walls or a single reinforced wall. Walls that are heavily shielded (such as a reactor casing) may prevent inter-obstruction vision from piercing them at all.

Takeuti Logic Circuits
-2 IC, +4 maximum mechanical aptitude,
+2 mechanical aptitude
Padding: head, neck, eyes
Code: MathematicsOfTears

Named for mathematician Gaisi Takeuti, this augmentation pairs the user with an ANI level expert system. In addition to assisting with recall, the system can explore several logical resolutions in parallel while the 'meat' brain attempts the more creative approaches the expert systems are frequently stumped by.

Yabusume Combat Senses
-2 IC, +6 maximum perception, +2 perception
Ceramic: head
Fibreweave: neck, eyes
Code: RapidResponse

This full head augment improves the subject's sense of sight, smell, hearing, and even taste. A rolling 24-hours of data is recorded onto a micro-drive that can be ejected from a discreet panel behind the left ear.

During the complex surgeries involved in replacing so many of the bodies key sensory organs, the skull and neck are reinforced with strong, low-rejection polymers that can resist most gunfire.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

SMART LINKED AUGMENTS

Defensive Blade
-2 IC
Code: RebelSword

The defensive blade augment was designed by a factory worker who wanted an ability to stand up to the ginbushi. While her rebellion cost her life, the illegal blueprints for the defensive blade augment made their way onto the wireless, and numerous versions have been produced over the years.

This augment pairs with any short blade (excluding the beam ring). Anytime the user is attacked while either wielding the weapon, or having a free hand to do so, the augment activates. Through a combination of manipulating the body's reflex system and micro-thrusters on the augment itself, the defensive blade springs into the most probable position from which to deflect the attack.

In game terms, the defensive blade turns the first successful *melee* attack each round versus the user into a miss. A character with post-human augmentations may wield multiple defensive blades (as many as they have hands), each defeating an additional attack. Ginbushi opponents with more ranks in *heijoshin* than the wielder has defensive blades may ignore this ability, something the factory worker learned too late.

Interceptor Targeting System
-2 IC
Code: FastestDraw

This smart weapon system uses high-speed motion sensors in the weapon itself to detect incoming threats and establish the quickest possible firing solution. The body's reflex pathways are then seized, allowing the interceptor system to override any natural human response and take a pre-emptive shot against the threat.

In game terms, the player may take an incidental action to make a *snapshot* [20] check in response to any incoming large fast-moving projectile that is larger than a bullet (eg grenades, throwing knives, rockets). The user must currently be wielding the smart-linked weapon.

Blast projectiles will detonate so that the nearest edge of the blast is at least three squares away from the user. The interceptor has no effect on weapons fired from within short range, or on any target with more than a large blast.

The interceptor does not give any additional attacks versus charging opponents, unless they are moving at extreme speed (e.g., a cheetah at full run).

Shock Net
-2 IC
Code: NoDisintergrations

Invented by a callous bounty hunter with a cyberneticist bent, the shock net is designed to take down targets alive… generally.

The net is a series of tennis-ball-sized drones linked by a carbon fibre net. Once per round, the user may direct the net (wirelessly) to capture a target. The net moves up to ten squares and, on reaching its target, attempts to collapse on them.

The target rolls a *react* check versus the user's *snapshot* (this roll is completely free; the net is utilising the user's ability subconsciously). If the *react* is successful, the victim dodges the net by moving to the nearest available square (but the net can still attack them next round).

If the victim fails, they are captured under the net as the hover drones power down and let their weight pin the victim. Attempts to escape, or movements of any kind, result in the net delivering an escalating series of electric shocks. In game terms, once per round a *resist* or *endurance* [20] check may be made to attempt an escape. If this is successful, a *force* [20] check must be made to physically cast off the net. If this is unsuccessful, the agony of electric shock proved disabling for this round.

More importantly the first attempt to escape the net results in a singed wound to three random hit locations, regardless of the user's armour. Each additional attempt to escape results in a new round of wounds one category worse than the last until the character is suffering three immolated wounds each attempt (assuming they survive that far).

Once it has ensnared someone, the net cannot be redeployed until recharged with a power cell or by a generator of similar capacity. The net does not respond with electric shock to external attempts to free a victim and may be safely cut away or removed by another character as a complex action.

William Kwan (Quoc 2018/23)

Smart Grenades
-2 IC
Code: MindBomb

Smart grenades are a set of hovering grenades that orbit the user and are linked to their DNI. A character must purchase a set of grenades separately and place them in an appropriate weapon slot to benefit from this augment. The augment will affect any type of grenade a character might equip.

These were extremely popular before the Shatter; however, since then, many soldiers have been killed by their own smart grenades falling to the Whisper. Assuming your IC defence holds, these grenades confer two key benefits.

Firstly, they can be directed to move to a location and detonate on command. While the blast escape difficulty remains the same, the grenade can reach long range, and no attack roll is required, even if targeting a moving vehicle of speed rating 2 or lower. Faster vehicles are too fast for the grenades to catch. Grenades can reach locations out of line of sight, but only if the user is fully aware of the layout ('move behind that guys cover' is okay, 'go into that building and find the admin office' is not).

The second use is defensive. Smart grenades actively detect incoming large projectiles such as rockets, missiles, and other grenades (smart or otherwise). If one or more grenades are set to defensive mode, they will streak out to intercept the projectile and detonate it a safe distance from the user. The projectile will detonate so that the nearest edge of the blast is at least three squares away from the user. This function does not work on explosives fired from short range or on anything that can deliver a blast radius of large or greater. Lastly note that it triggers anytime the user is in the blast radius, even if they're not explicitly the target.

Either usage consumes munitions tokens per the grenade employed (usually two). If a user does not want their grenades to intercept projectiles, they may set them to passive mode on their turn. A user may select a certain number of grenades to set to defensive mode so that some, but not all, of their munitions may be consumed in a single round.

Thinker's Familiar
-2 IC, +4 maximum intelligence, +2 intelligence
Code: ExpertConcepts

The thinker's familiar is a small robot that began life as an assistant of victims of intellectually degenerative conditions. An attempt to improve the technology for the second year's release resulted in a device that defied expectations.

Linking the users mind to an ANI system, the familiar was able to help users solve problems that would have escaped even the canniest, full-faculty individual. At the time of the Shatter it remains unclear exactly how the thinker's familiar managed to provide the level of assistance it does, seeming to pre-empt a user's conscious inquiries with the right data at the right time. Rumours abound that the familiar might actually contain full learning and adaptive AIs.

The familiar is available in a wide range of physical forms, from a simple hovering sphere to a miniature animal or even fantastical creatures like tiny dragons.

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POST HUMAN AUGMENTATIONS

Kami Yokai
-2 IC
Ceramic: Head, neck, eyes
Code: DangerousLocks

Created specifically for assassins, the *kami yokai* [Hair Demon/Monster] replaces the user's natural hair with prehensile lengths of carbon fiber. The hair is controlled by DNI and coiled reserves inside the scalp enable the hair to extend out to short range. With an opposed force check, a character may bind up to two of a target's limbs with the hair.

Because it is intended for infiltration, the kami yokai also allows users to change the colour (and obviously length) of their hair at will. Cutting the hair is extremely difficult and requires a slashing weapon with an AP of ceramic.

The hair can also be used to make an attack, for this the below profile must be placed in a weapon slot (it is a short melee weapon):

Crushing Hair			Short melee
AP: Ceramic		Range: Short	
Clipped [1]	Fractured [2–3]	Shattered [4–5]	Pulverised [6]

Constriction: After a successful attack, the target hit location is bound by the hair and can only be removed by an opposed force check (simple action).

On successive rounds, a new injury may be dealt to the bound limb with no rolls and as an incidental action. The injury is one category greater than the previous. Once a limb is pulverised, no further damage can be inflicted.

Kōtetsu Tenshi
-2 IC
Code: SilverWings

The *Kōtetsu Tenshi* [Steel Angel] augment consists of a pair of seraphim style wings made from shape-memory alloys. While the wings themselves do not allow flight, they are paired with a Newtonian lattice and micro-thrusters that discretely complete the illusion.

Besides giving the user the ability to fly at a rate equal to their normal movement speed (in any direction including up), the augment provides a defensive function as well. Once per round, the user may use the wings to block a ranged attack. The attack treats the armour of its hit location as steel unless the hit location already had better armour.

The decision to use the wings defensively is made after the hit is confirmed, but before the hit location or damage is determined.

Scorpion Augment
-2 IC
Code: ScorpionAndTheFrog

This dramatic scorpion tail looms threateningly over anyone who gets too near the user. During combat, it makes good on those threats.

Each round, the augment attacks one enemy adjacent to the user. If it did not attack during the user's turn, it makes an off-turn attack versus the first opponent to move into an adjacent square. Attacks by the scorpion augment do not count as actions for the user, but it can never make more than one attack per round.

In addition to its augment slot, the augment uses one of the character's weapon slots (it is a short melee weapon).

Scorpion Augment			Short melee
AP: Ceramic		Range: Melee	
Nicked [1]	Punctured [2]	Pierced Deeply [3–4]	Run Through [5–6]

Neurotoxin

If the target suffers at least a *nicked* wound, they are afflicted by the neurotoxin until the end of the encounter. At the start of each turn the victim must make an *endurance* [15] check or suffer a point of mental trauma. If a character's injuries equal their wounds tolerance when this wound occurs, they go into shock.

Spiderwalk
-2 IC
Code: RoofOrPath

The Spiderwalk augment is a set of four long spindly limbs that extend from the user's back. These limbs can lift the user over the ground and carry them quickly over difficult terrain, up sheer walls, and even along ceilings.

Adhesion is achieved through a combination of magnetics, chemical adhesives and significant grip strength. While using spider walk a character may perform a simple action in the same round as a long dash.

Watchtower AMS
-2 IC
Code: JokerToTheThief

The original Watchtower anti-missile system was designed to protect vehicles from rocket attacks using high-speed radar and a solid-state laser. It wasn't long before a shoulder mounted version of this weapon was produced.

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The first missile fired at the character from medium range or greater, each round, is shot down. The weapon detonates so that the near edge of its blast radius is two squares away from the character. Weapons with an explosion radius greater than a large blast cannot be prevented by Watchtower.

TAINTED AUGMENTATIONS

Augmentations that the Whisper has accessed with nanites are referred to as tainted, compromised or Whispered, depending on who you speak too.

Any augmentation removed from a lost is tainted, and augmentations recovered from various labs can be as well. They're dangerous to use, but fortunately they're easily recognisable to connected who can hear the Whisper emanating from them.

All tainted augmentations will regenerate a critical wound or less every round and a maiming wound every 24 hours. This repair protocol only applies to the augment itself.

Any time the Whisper, or one of its agents, makes a wireless attack versus a character with a tainted augmentation, it automatically succeeds.

Tencom Mindspace Uplink - Log #21410313_7753_0053

[!! 32 unviewed notifications]

Welcome back to your message stream! Lark is <online>

Quixie: so-so! SO! SOOOOOONJA!!!!!
Lark: stop! I'm at dinner and dad is glaring at me. No wireless at the table
Quixie: ugh. I hate him
Lark: there's a club for that. What's urgent?
Quixie: I'm getting a tail!
Lark: !!
Quixie: I know! Mum's so ridiculous but dad said it's my body, my money, my birthday, my choice! I should have enough to afford one next month!
Lark: your mum is so weird. how does she even function? I'd die without my DNI.
Quixie: right? She's so embarrassing, but anyway! call me after dinner and help me pick one xx

AWETECH-0

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BEYOND CYBERNETICS

Cybernetics transformed the Verdant Crest, and a lot of the Empire beyond, but it has competitors both new and old. Some are cheaper, some less confronting, and some just plain more advanced.

BEYOND CYBERNETICS

COST	AUGMENT
¥400,000	Basic Prosthetic
¥4,000,000	Cloned Limb/Organ
¥100,000,000	Gene-enhancement Therapy
¥70,000,000	Nano-augmentation Treatment

Basic Prosthetic
-2 IC
Code: NeedAHand (arm), GiveMeALegUp (leg)

This basic, DNI-linked prosthetic is intended as 'no-frills' limb replacements for people involved in accidents. A basic prosthetic is intended to restore an injured character to 'as near as possible' their original state.

This category covers both replacement limbs, as well as replacement organs should internal damage occur. A prosthetic head is not possible as current technology cannot replace the brain.

Cloned Limb/Organ
A more expensive and rarer technology for people who have lost a limb or organ and are seeking a replacement without resorting to augmentation. Much of the expense of cloned organs comes from the genetically mimical stem cells (GMSC) the organs are grown from.

This material must be kept in an almost perfectly sterile environment until it can be exposed to the intended recipient. Exposure to even a small amount of normal human tissue will cause the GMSC to rapidly copy that genome throughout its structure. Great care must be taken to ensure that only the intended recipient of the cloned limb/organ is allowed to mark the GMSC, otherwise transplant rejection can occur with often fatal consequences.

Once marked, the GMSC can be programmed to form any organ or limb a human naturally possesses. The growth process takes about twelve hours, after which implantation can take place immediately.

Cloned Tissue and Disconnected
One of the biggest challenges of *Wireless Soul Transmission* is dealing with disconnected who have lost limbs. Prior to the Shatter, augmentation, or basic prosthetics, were the go-to answer for this problem. For a disconnected, however, this means changing the character drastically.

Cloned limbs/organs make the obvious answer, but their comparative rarity can be difficult to work with in a campaign. Later in the game, it is probable that the players have the sorts of allies who might be willing, and able, to provide such advanced treatment in exchange for previous and future service.

Prior to that, things are more difficult. If a disconnected is dismembered early in your game, your best recourse is to make it an element of the story. The next session should see the party trying to learn the location of a tissue cloning lab where they might find enough GMSCs. The lab will, of course, be defended, and the players will probably need to bring along a doctor willing to perform the procedure.

The problems noted above aren't entirely unique to the disconnected. Ginbushi cannot be traditionally augmented and must receive cloned limbs as well. We focused on disconnected here because the ginbushi are broadly more resilient.

Gene-enhancement Therapy
Gene therapy is a very long-term way of improving a select group of beings. Because it is generational in nature, it is likely of no use to your players, but they may encounter characters who have benefited from the process.

Genetic-therapy allows a small number of changes to be made to an unborn child that will increase its potential once born. As these treatments are genetic, they are passed on to any child the subject has, with cumulative benefits from both parents. The child of enhanced subjects, may likewise be enhanced prior to birth. In this way, small changes can be stacked across generation to yield a potent bloodline.

Mechanically each generation of gene-enhancement can increase a single trait maximum by two points (to a maximum of 12 for any trait).

The Averyn have possessed this technology for over a century, but it is not one they shared for both political and ethical reasons. That said, there is no law against independent research. Assuming humanity was able to steal the technology shortly after they encountered

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the Averyn and adapt it to the human genome in a few years, then the oldest enhanced bloodlines could be three or four generations.

Nano-augmentation

The nanites used to create a nano-augmented human are carefully crafted and coded to DNA match the target subject. Once the nanite colony is ready implantation is complicated only by the risks involved. It is critical that the patient demonstrate the ability to communicate with the nanites early. Failure to do so means the nanites will attack the host with deadly consequences.

Since nanites are almost impossible to get rid of once they're in the bloodstream, the procedure typically takes the following steps:

1. Removing All Augmentation

   One ubiquitous problem with nano-augmentation is that the nanites identify other augmentation as foreign bodies and destroy them. Before nano-augmentation can be performed, all augmentations, including any DNIs, must be removed.

   Since this frequently leaves the subject without one or more limbs, the process is normally to replace removed augmentations with cloned ones. This costly process must be completed (and funded) separately to the nano-augmentation procedure.

2. Exposure and Observation

   Since the number of aggressive nanites the body can safely absorb is quite limited, the next step is to administer very small volumes of nanites. The nanites are sprayed onto the skin where they immediately slip through the pores and make their way into the bloodstream.

   After the first treatment, the subject is placed under observation for twenty-four hours. Ginbushi normally meditate in this time to enhance their chances of success.

   A player may make up to three *resist* [15] checks during this time and must succeed at least once to gain control of the nanites. Should they fail, they are deemed incompatible, and the treatment goes no further. Without a critical mass, the nanites are programmed to become inert after another twenty-four hours and are metabolised.

3. Full-scale Treatment

   Should stage 2 proceed without a hitch, the subject is provided with the rest of the colony of nanites. Introducing them slowly ensures that the new nanites have time to meet and synchronise with fellows from stage 2, a process that ensures all are under control of the subject.

   Properly administered, Stage 3 takes a further 48 hours. At the completion of the treatment, the character is now considered a ginbushi. They retain levels and abilities from their previous class (where it is rational to do so) but their future levels must be as a ginbushi, starting from Level 1 at their next milestone. For obvious reasons we recommend you consider the implantation process itself a milestone.

Cutting corners

Players in a hurry may attempt to speed up the process, skipping step 2 and/or greatly accelerating stage 3. Doing this adds significant peril for the subject.

To reflect this, have the player roll *resist* [effort 100] checks. At the same time the GM should roll unmodified d20s to reflect the new nanites arriving. Any time you're ahead of the player, compare the difference to the below table. Damage is cumulative, but a character who has not exceeded their wounds tolerance may reduce the wound as normal.

Other characters may attempt to provide 'on the fly' medical treatment (the party is considered to be 'regrouping' at the end of every roll)

NANITE DAMAGE

GM AHEAD BY...	RESULT
5–10	A random hit location is lacerated
11–15	A random hit location is fractured
16–20	A random hit location is charred
20+	A random hit location is pulverised

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VEHICLE AND STARSHIP WEAPONS

LARGER BLAST SIZES

The scale of weapons mounted on military vehicles and starships are capable of delivering much greater explosive force than any personal weapon. To reflect this there are some new blast sizes.

Large blast
The large blast is a 5 x 5 tile square centred on the tile where the explosive detonated. As with normal blasts, any character caught in the blast radius suffers the explosions damage to five hit locations.

Anyone directly (not diagonally) adjacent to a large blast suffers a single hit from the shrapnel.

Characters may attempt to escape from a large blast as normal.

Building-area blast
As the name implies, a blast like this could consume an entire multi-storey building. Explosions of this scale are generally a narrative element, rather than something that should be represented on the tactical map. If it becomes absolutely necessary, consider a building-scale blast to cover a 15 x 15 tile square with a 3-tile shrapnel radius reaching out from the edges.

Explosions of this scale are utterly unsurvivable, and any character caught in the blast area is either vaporised or so badly destroyed as to be almost unidentifiable. The 'escaping from a blast' rules do not apply to characters on foot (unless perhaps they're on the very edge) but should be used for vehicles.

Town-area blast
A town-area blast measures somewhere in the 500-kiloton range and is likely to demolish everything within three to four kilometres of the blast site. Damage and serious injuries from shrapnel and heat are likely to extend at least another couple of kilometres beyond the blast site.

Explosions of this scale are definitely unsurvivable, and any character caught in the blast area is completely vaporised. The 'escaping from a blast' rules apply only to starships.

Even larger blasts
Very few weapons exceed the 500-kiloton mark out of practicality. This is not to say that there aren't a variety of doomsday weapons that each species keep on hand.

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VEHICLE WEAPONS

NAME	COST	RANGE	AP	TYPE	MINOR	SERIOUS	SEVERE	MAIMING
Apollo Missile Launcher	¥200,000,000	Extreme	Adv. Composite	Explosive	1	2	3–4	5–6
Energy Cannon	¥400,000,000	Extreme	Adv. Composite	Explosive	1	2	3–4	5–6
Hurricane Cannon	¥200,000,000	Long	Steel	Slashing	1	2	3–5	6
Kinetic Cannon	¥120,000,000	Extreme	Adv. Composite	Slashing	–	1	2–3	4–6
Rocket Pack	¥10,400,000	Long	Adv. Composite	Explosive	1	2–4	5	6

STARSHIP WEAPONS

NAME	COST	RANGE	AP	TYPE	MINOR	SERIOUS	SEVERE	MAIMING
Beam Cannon	¥50,000,000	Long*	Archite	Explosive	–	–	–	1–6
FAST defence gun	¥5,000,000	Short*	Adv. Composite	Piercing	1	2	3	4–6
Fusion Torpedo	¥700,000,000	Extreme*	Amorphous Metal	Explosive	–	–	–	1–6
Particle Lance	¥800,000,000	Medium*	Amorphous Metal	Blunt	–	–	–	1–6
Total Conversion Warhead	¥30,000,000,000	Extreme*	∞	Piercing	–	–	–	1–6

** Note starships use a different scale (see p.230). Even short range space weapons have extreme range at ground scale.*

The HPDF maintained a small stockpile of strategic fusion weapons measuring in the multi-megaton range, and certainly any species capable of interstellar flight can harness similar energies.

For mechanical purposes, these weapons should be considered to be in the same category as town-Area blasts. For narrative concerns (i.e., just how much of the countryside can it destroy) we recommend you take advantage of online resources like *Nukemap* that will show you the practical effects of multi-megaton blasts.

AMMUNITION

Because of their size, vehicles tend to have fairly substantial ammunition reserves. Vehicle weapons never use munitions tokens, even if the weapon is normally man portable (such as a pulse gun) and would use munitions.

Some vehicle weapons, such as the Apollo missile, have very large ammunition. When mounted on a vehicle, the entry will specify how many rounds are available. If a vehicle entry does not discuss ammo, assume the ammunition supply is, for all reasonable uses, infinite. This is true even if it includes a weapon system that might have limited ammunition on a different vehicle (e.g., an Apollo missile on a ground vehicle has limited ammunition, on a large starship it does not).

VEHICLE WEAPONS

Apollo Missile Launcher
Large Blast 15, AA, Risk margin 10

The Apollo is a stand-off artillery weapon that doubles as an anti-aircraft missile. Able to shoot down most aircraft in a single hit, and even damage small starships, the Apollo is not to be underestimated.

Like the Artemis, it can utilise an advanced guidance system that allows vehicles to be targeted without line of sight and provides AA capability (which allows attacks versus strafing aircraft). Unlike the Artemis, this system is not integrated into the standard launcher, so a separate radar system must be utilised, or the missiles can only attack line of sight ground targets.

In either event, the missiles are fired directly up to clear obstacles before hooking around to strike surface targets from above.

Unfortunately, these advanced guidance packages are risky. Unless employed at short range, the Whisper can take control of a missile in flight and redirect it at a new target (often the launcher itself).

Apollo Missile launcher			
AP: Advanced Composite		Range: Extreme	
Singed [1]	Burned [2]	Charred [3–4]	Immolated [5–6]
Large Blast 15, AA, risk margin 10			

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Energy Cannon
Blast 20

The energy cannon fires a shell of near-plasma-state hydrogen. The actual projectile is relatively small, but it carries a brilliant incandescent aura as it burns through the air at supersonic speed. Lethal against both dismounted soldiers and heavily armoured vehicles, the energy cannon is perhaps the deadliest direct-fire weapon mounted on a ground vehicle.

Energy Cannon			
AP: Advanced Composite		Range: Extreme	
Singed [1]	Burned [2]	Charred [3–4]	Immolated [5–6]
Blast 20			

Hurricane Cannon
Blast 20, repeating 2

The hurricane cannon's rounds fragment just shy of their target, releasing a barrage of high-velocity shrapnel intended to lacerate dismounted troops and cripple light vehicles.

As a repeating cannon, this weapon places two separate blast templates which must either overlap or share a common edge. Each receives its own attack roll.

Hurricane Cannon			
AP: Steel		Range: Long	
Grazed [1]	Lacerated [2]	Crippled [3–5]	Cleaved [6]
Blast 20, Repeating 2			
Repeating – Place two blast templates which must either overlap or share a common edge. Each receives its own attack roll.			

Kinetic Cannon
Considered to have the Large Blast property for vehicle damage

A human weapon, though there are plenty of equivalents in the armoury of other species. The kinetic cannon uses an enlarged pulse gun mechanism and sabot to deliver a tungsten stake to its target. Though it appears to be a single piece, the tungsten round is actually intentionally compromised by dozen of micro-fractures throughout its shape.

As it penetrates a hardened target, the stake fragments, filling the target's vulnerable interior with a shotgun blast of decelerated super hard metal.

Though extremely effective versus vehicles, the projectile is not explosive and has limited effect on groups of dismounted infantry or light structures. Though not technically a missile, the kinetic cannon rounds have proved to be vulnerable to the Watchtower AMS system.

Kinetic Cannon			
AP: Advanced Composite		Range: Extreme	
Grazed	Lacerated [1]	Crippled [2–3]	Cleaved [4–6]
Considered to have the large blast property versus vehicles			
Can be intercepted by AMS systems			

Rocket Pack
Four shots, blast 15, ripple-fire 4

This four-pack of anti-vehicle rockets provides small vehicles with a punch well above their weight. The obvious limitation is a comparatively small number of shots.

This weapon has four shots. Recoil attacks may fire anywhere between one round, and all remaining ammo. Blast templates from multiple shots must either overlap or share a common edge, and each receives its own attack roll.

Rocket Pack			
AP: Advanced Composite		Range: Long	
Singed [1]	Burned [2–4]	Charred [5]	Immolated [6]
Blast 15, ripple fire 4			
Ripple fire – This weapon has four shots. Recoil attacks may fire anywhere between one round and all remaining ammo. Blast templates from multiple shots must either overlap or share a common edge, and each receives its own attack roll.			

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STARSHIP WEAPONS

Beam Cannon
Town-area blast 25, beam, no volley-fire

Beam cannons are huge aperture energy weapons, often MASERs, that can deliver gigajoules of energy per square metre across a several hundred-metre diameter target surface. All up, this pure energy weapon delivers something in the order of a half-megaton nuke with each blast and is enough to disintegrate most warships in a single shot.

As a beam weapon this attack ignores magnetic screens.

Beam Cannon			
AP: Archite		Range: Long	
Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated [1–6]
Town-area blast 25			

FAST Defence Gun
Large Blast 20, AA
The Fast Acquisition Saturating (FAST) defence gun is a rotary barrel energy cannon on a rapid tracking turret. The paired computer system calculates a target's likely evasion options, and the weapon unleashes a barrage of energy projectiles across those paths.

Each FAST gun can turn a single torpedo hit against it's parent vessel into a miss, but it may not then attack in the following round.

When used against surface targets, treat this weapon as though it fires four times each round. The blast templates must be placed adjacent to each other as with a repeating weapon.

FAST Defence Gun			
AP: Adv. Composite		Range: Short	
Nicked [1]	Punctured [2]	Pierced Deeply [3]	Shot Through [4–6]
Large Blast 20, AA			

Fusion Torpedo
Town-area blast 25, risk margin 20
Fusion torpedoes are first strike, ship-killer weapons. An escort is no match for a cruiser in a normal engagement, but if it can get into torpedo range before the victim can activate their defence batteries, a single torpedo can destroy an entire ship.

Torpedoes are much too slow to track light craft, but they are capable of atmospheric entry and can be used as strategic weapons against a planet. Of course, like other guided weapons, the Whisper can seize control of them with comparative ease.

Fusion Torpedo			
AP: Amorphous Metal		Range: Extreme	
Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated [1–6]
Town-area blast 25, risk margin 20			

Particle Lance
Building-area blast 25

Particle lances fire plasma state micro-particles at velocities of around three percent the speed of light. On contact, these release huge amounts of energy in both the heat and kinetic spectrum. Though each beam lasts only a second or so, it imparts enough force to level a skyscraper.

Particle Lance			
AP: Amorphous Metal		Range: Medium	
Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised [1–6]
Building-area blast 25			

Total Conversion Warhead

Total Conversion (TC) warheads are the most feared weapon in the Averyn arsenal and are tightly controlled. The exact science is known only to the Averyn, but a detonation generates what the Averyn call an 'annihilation wave'. Every time an atom strikes a part of the wave, the wave changes states between 'positive' and 'negative'. Since the wave propagates at the speed of light, it changes states at an immeasurable rate.

In its 'positive state' it has no effect on normal matter, in its 'negative' state the wave turns ordinary atoms into their antimatter counterparts. In this way, an annihilation wave will turn every other atom of its target into antimatter. These antimatter atoms subsequently annihilate on contact with the normal matter, a reaction that itself unleashes a blast of some ten megatons per kilogram of mass in the target.

Annihilation waves are, according to the Averyn, the most dangerous phenomenon in the universe. Fortunately, they do not propagate across mass

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densities less than 100 grams/m^3. This means a wave could easily annihilate an entire planet but would not reach its neighbouring bodies.

As a rule, a TC detonation will annihilate any astrological object it hits, and the energy unleashed by that reaction will vaporise its satellites. If it hits a planet, the planet and all of its moons are wiped out. If it hits a star, the entire system is wiped out. It is speculated that such a weapon could wipe out the galaxy if delivered to one of the megastars in the galactic core. Of course, equally, if it's used on a gram of dust floating alone in the depths of space it will destroy only that gram of dust.

Though the annihilation itself is a pure energy reaction, the vaporisation of satellites creates a super-hot cloud of hydrogen and sub-atomic particles. This expanding cloud can prove dangerous to nearby planets (or star systems, depending on what caused the cloud) and is certainly not safe to fly through.

The TC warhead itself is only about the size of a basketball, but it weighs nearly eighty kilograms. Traditional deployment sees the weapon replace the warhead of a fusion torpedo. Of course, the weapon could be deployed by much smaller projectiles (an Apollo missile for instance) but such weapons are unlikely to get the warhead a safe distance away from the firing platform.

Obviously, the use of TC weapons is considered abhorrent by the galactic community and, even accounting for the darkest parts of its history, the Empire has only ever detonated a total of five TC weapons, including two for test purposes.

TC Warhead			
AP: -		Range: Extreme	
Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated [1–6]
A total conversion warhead completely annihilates any target it hits, from a starship to a planet. Refer p.217.			

VEHICLES

The vehicles in the following list are either military-grade or rare corporate assets that player characters may have heard of but would not have encountered regularly, even before the Shatter. Many of these vehicles may show up in control of the Whisper, but don't be afraid to give your heroes some top shelf toys to play with now and again.

Where to find them?

Most of the military vehicles not destroyed in the Shatter (and its immediate aftermath) are firmly in the Whisper's control. Even the military-minded corporations, like the Ootori Syndicate, have only a handful of such platforms at their disposal.

But the Whisper's destruction of Hansei's military weapons was not complete, and this was an intentional move. The Whisper does not want anyone stumbling upon a depot with a hundred Stormwolfs, but it doesn't mind scavengers coming across an Enforcer at an abandoned checkpoint. Generally, the Whisper endures them raising some havoc and only seizes control when they return home. At that point, it turns the vehicle on the survivors' settlement, making them watch as the menace they brought runs down family and friends.

Using military vehicles in your game

Knowing how dangerous they can be ought to turn your players off adopting a military vehicle for personal use. As a GM, this is a fairly beneficial attitude for them to take; *Wireless Soul Transmission* plays best when the players aren't flying a C-LEVV gunship over the city blasting apart collectors with reckless abandon.

Military vehicles can, and *should* still be great fun, but they'll require a little more setup from the GM. Since the players are unlikely to have the opportunity (let alone the inclination) to drive a Whisper-vulnerable vehicle across town, placement is critical. Suppose the players need to cross a courtyard full of berserkers but, conveniently, there happens to be an Enforcer crashed into the wall nearby. Sure, they'll only be able to safely use it for a few rounds, but that should be enough to get them safely across.

You can even build a quest arc around the very problem of limited use. A Stormwolf might be sitting in overwatch over a parkway where its crew abandoned

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it. When the players first pass this, they may rightly leave it lie. Later, when they realise they must destroy a rampaging Chevalier, you could remind them about this tank. The challenge is now to find the safest way to bring these two tanks together. Do they lure the Chevalier or risk driving the Stormwolf? Perhaps a little of both?

WEIGHTLESS AUTONOMOUS CANNON

Movement type: Hover
Speed Rating: 1

Risk Margin: 30
Mechanical Tolerance: 1
Primary Armour: Steel
Damage Threshold: LAV
Annihilation Threshold: Blast

Crew positions: Unmanned
Access points: Unmanned

Weakness – Poorly protected control core
Difficulty / skill: *Engineering* [15]
Vulnerable to: Any weapon that can defeat steel armour
Impact: A single attack versus the electronics cluster (the 'head' of the WAC) will disable its delicate control systems and shut down the entire vehicle.

Note that any hit location that comes up 'gunner' or 'driver' will also hit this weakness.

Description:
The WAC system was implemented as a means to give dismounted troops access to a heavy gun system that could be manoeuvred into tight spaces where a vehicle could not go.

Consisting of an energy cannon mounted on a lightly armoured hover platform, the WAC is about the size of a small horse. Its autonomous systems are not advanced, and it requires a DNI-linked commander to provide navigational direction and fire orders. If required to make any checks (including to shoot), the WAC uses its operator's skills.

The vehicle can move over any terrain, including water, and can climb to a height of a little over two metres. The WAC can move in any direction without turning, but it is not fast (moves 10 squares per round).

The autonomous cannon cannot fire while in motion and requires crew to deploy its landing claws. Two simple actions are required to put down the four legs, but these can be performed simultaneously by separate characters. The weapon cannot fire in the same round as it is deployed, but deployment can be performed at the end of a move.

Freeing from the Whisper:
There are reports that various survivors have recovered WACs and removed their Wireless dependence. 'Safe' WACs run a physical cable to a tablet PC carried by the operator who must stay within short range of the vehicle at all times because of the limited cable length.

WEAPONS

Energy Cannon			
AP: Advanced Composite		Range: Extreme	
Singed [1]	Burned [2]	Charred [3–4]	Immolated [5–6]
Blast 20			

Variants:

Anti-aircraft:
In place of the energy cannon this version mounts an Apollo Missile Launcher.

Apollo Missile launcher			
AP: Advanced Composite		Range: Extreme	
Singed [1]	Burned [2]	Charred [3–4]	Immolated [5–6]
Large Blast 15, AA, Risk margin 10			
The anti-aircraft WAC carries only a single shot.			

Ammo Mule:
The ammo mule is an unarmed variant of the WAC, designed to carry ammunition. Most commonly these carried extra shots for a different WAC, but special forces teams on extended deployments would also use ammo mules for conventional ammunition (or even sundry) cartage.

A character may replenish all their munitions tokens from a mule as a simple action. Alternatively, a mule could carry two missiles for an anti-aircraft WAC

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

ENFORCER – URBAN OPERATIONS VEHICLE

Movement type: Wheeled
Speed Rating: 2

Risk Margin: 40
Mechanical Tolerance: 3
Primary Armour: Steel
Damage Threshold: Blast
Annihilation Threshold: Large Blast

Crew positions: Driver, gunner, 10 soldiers
Access points: Single interior cabin accessible from a fast deployment ramp at the rear, two armoured doors on either side and a hatch over the gunner and driver positions.

Weakness – External Sensors
Difficulty / skill: *Engineering* or *Warcraft* [15]
Vulnerable to: Any weapon that can defeat ceramic armour
Impact: A single successful attack against one of the vehicle's external sensors will blind the vehicle on that facing. This may force the vehicle to operate partially blind or the crew to pop their hatches (at which point they may be targeted directly).

The attack can only blind the facing towards the attacker. This weakness can be exploited three additional times, once from each facing (front, back, left and right).

Description:
The Enforcer is a six-wheeled tank designed for urban operations. Compared to an armoured car, it has greater survivability, more capacity, and a greater weapons payload. The Enforcer is a delicate balance of systems, being the heaviest vehicle deployable by a Gyrfalcon.

Primary armament is a dual-barrelled hurricane cannon on a turret with a dedicated gunner, and a pulse gun on each flank that are manned by passengers.

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT:

Smoke launchers

Incidental

This vehicle has access to single-use smoke launchers which can be triggered by the driver as an incidental action. The smoke completely covers the vehicle and all immediately adjacent tiles. Any attacks into, out of, or through the smoke suffer 1d6 disadvantage.

The smoke dissipates by the end of the vehicle's next turn.

Watchtower AMS

Off-turn action

This vehicle is equipped with a Watchtower anti-missile system. This high-speed radar is paired with a solid-state laser to shoot down incoming missiles.

The first missile fired at the vehicle from medium range or greater, each round, is shot down. The weapon detonates so that the near edge of its blast radius is two squares away from the vehicle. Weapons with greater than a Large Blast cannot be prevented by Watchtower.

WEAPONS

Ram

AP: Steel — Range: Melee

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2]	[3–5]	[6]

Considered to have the blast property for vehicle damage.

Hurricane Cannon

AP: Steel — Range: Long

Grazed	Lacerated	Crippled	Cleaved
[1]	[2]	[3–5]	[6]

Blast 20, Repeating 2

Repeating – Place two blast templates which must either overlap or share a common edge. Each receives its own attack.

Pulse Guns (x2)

AP: Steel — Range: Medium

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Autofire only, LAV, first 2 autofire attacks always trigger additional autofire attacks.

Variants:

Anti-aircraft/Artillery
The Enforcer-D is the most common mobile missile battery in the Verdant Crest. It trades the hurricane cannon for a four-rack launcher of Apollo missiles. Troop space is swapped out for four additional missiles that can be used to reload the launcher. Reloading is done from outside the vehicle and requires a full round action by two crew for each missile.

With the troop space gone, the two pulse guns are moved to pintle mounts, one at the gunner's hatch and one at the driver's hatch.

Apollo Missile launcher

AP: Advanced Composite — Range: Extreme

Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated
[1]	[2]	[3–4]	[5–6]

Large Blast 15, AA, Ripple fire (4), Risk Margin 10

Ripple fire – This weapon has four loaded shots. Recoil attacks may fire anywhere between one round and all remaining ammo. Blast templates from multiple shots must either overlap or share a common edge and each receives its own attack roll.

William Kwan (Quiz - 36187234)

C3
The command, control and communications Enforcer (also known as the Enforcer-C) is most commonly seen acting as the crucial tracking radar for a platoon of Enforcer-Ds. This variant trades out the hurricane cannon for a long-range radar that includes orbital target tracking.

The troop space is swapped out for a mapping table and a bank of communication and tracking consoles. The port and starboard pintle mounted pulse guns are removed to be replaced by a single weapon on a pintle mount at the driver's hatch.

As a communications nexus, the Enforcer-C is particularly vulnerable to the Whisper – it's risk margin is reduced to 20.

STORMWOLF – MAIN BATTLE TANK

Movement type: Tracked
Speed Rating: 2

Risk Margin: 60
Mechanical Tolerance: 4
Primary Armour: Advanced Composite
Damage Threshold: Blast
Annihilation Threshold: Large Blast

Crew positions: Driver, gunner, commander
Access points: Each crew member accesses a central cabin through their own hatch. Each hatch has a pintle mounted pulse gun.

Weakness – External Sensors
Difficulty / skill: *Engineering* or *Warcraft* [15]
Vulnerable to: Any weapon that can defeat ceramic armour
Impact: A single successful attack against one of the vehicle's external sensors will blind the vehicle on that facing. This may force the vehicle to operate partially blind or the crew to pop their hatches (at which point they may be targeted directly).

The attack can only blind the facing towards the attacker. This weakness can be exploited five times, once from each facing (front, back, left and right) and one for the vehicle's turret.

Weakness – Weak Rear Armour
Difficulty / skill: *Engineering* or *Warcraft[15]*
Vulnerable to: Any weapon that can pierce steel armour
Impact: Attacks on this vehicle from its rear facing treat the vehicle armour value as steel.

Description:
In 2132, the Hansei Planetary Defence Force upgraded its armoured support units to Chevalier autonomous battle tanks. While these were infinitely more palatable for a vehicle whose battlefield roll was to attract enemy fire, they also proved ideal for the Whisper.

The Stormwolf was the non-autonomous predecessor to the Chevalier. On paper, these vehicles were either scrapped or on-sold to poorer members of the Empire. Despite this, reports of a band of rebels who recovered and revived a decommissioned Stormwolf refuse to die.

Dating back to 2090, the Stormwolf is larger than the Chevalier and does not have modern defences like anti-missile systems or magnetic screens. Its kinetic cannon remains extremely effective versus vehicles, but only if it can circumvent AMS systems.

The Stormwolf's crew of three (gunner, driver, commander) each access the cabin through their own hatch and each has a pintle mounted pulse gun.

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT:

Smoke launchers

Incidental

This vehicle has access to single-use smoke launchers which can be triggered by the driver as an incidental action. The smoke completely covers the vehicle and all immediately adjacent tiles. Any attacks into, out of, or through the smoke suffer 1d6 disadvantage.

The smoke dissipates by the end of the vehicle's next turn.

WEAPONS

Ram

AP: Advanced Composite — Range: Melee

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2]	[3–4]	[5–6]

Considered to have the blast property for vehicle damage.

Kinetic Cannon

AP: Advanced Composite — Range: Extreme

Grazed	Lacerated	Crippled	Cleaved
	[1]	[2–3]	[4–6]

Considered to have the large blast property versus vehicles

Can be intercepted by AMS systems

Pulse Guns (x3)

AP: Steel — Range: Medium

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Autofire only, LAV, first 2 autofire attacks always trigger additional autofire attacks.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

CARVIE– COMBAT ARTICULATED VEHICLE

Movement type: Bipedal
Speed Rating: 1

Mechanical Tolerance: 4
Primary Armour: Advanced Composite
Damage Threshold: Blast
Annihilation Threshold: Large Blast

Crew positions: Pilot

Access points: Cabin accessed from a hatch on the top of the shoulders.

Weakness – Windows (reinforced)
Difficulty / skill: Apparent
Vulnerable to: All weapons with an AP of at least ceramic
Impact: The vehicles pilot is clearly visible and may be targeted separately to the vehicle. When attacking this weakness, roll a normal attack against the crew member of your choice instead of the vehicle.

Weakness – Weak Rear Armour
Difficulty / skill: *Engineering* or *Warcraft* [15]
Vulnerable to: Any weapon that can pierce steel armour
Impact: Attacks on this vehicle from its rear facing treat the vehicle armour value as steel.

Description:
Despite no shortage of science fiction depicting bipedal war machines, such devices were never widely adopted within the empire. Being tall and dramatic might be inspiring, but on a modern battlefield it makes one a prominent target.

With the collapse of the conventional armed forces however, it was only a matter of time until survivors started strapping armour and weapons to salvaged Arvies.

Well aware of the dangers such a vehicle might present, and with plenty of options to choose from, the survivors constrained their upgrades to older model Arvies that have no wireless uplink and are therefore beyond the call of the Whisper.

Fit-outs vary, but this version has a single articulated hand, with the other being replaced by an energy cannon. A pair of pulse guns are mounted on the torso to provide anti-personnel capability and a rocket pack is slung to one shoulder for added punch.

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT:

Smoke launchers

Incidental

This vehicle has access to single-use smoke launchers which can be triggered by the driver as an incidental action. The smoke completely covers the vehicle and all immediately adjacent tiles. Any attacks into, out of, or through the smoke suffer 1d6 disadvantage.

The smoke dissipates by the end of the vehicle's next turn.

Industrial Strength

While using the Carvie the pilot may perform *force* checks as though they had a +10 modifier.

WEAPONS

Fist

AP: Ceramic — Range: Melee

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2]	[3–4]	[5–6]

Smash and grab: If the Carvie makes a successful attack with its hand, the victim suffers damage and then must make an immediate *react* [10] check or be grabbed. As a free action, the Carvie may repeat this damage on a grabbed character each round without rolling to hit.

Damage to the arm, or an opposed *force* check as a simple action, will cause the Carvie to release its victim.

Energy Cannon

AP: Advanced Composite — Range: Extreme

Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated
[1]	[2]	[3–4]	[5–6]

Blast 20

Rocket Pack (x2)

AP: Advanced Composite — Range: Long

Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated
[1]	[2–4]	[5]	[6]

Blast 15, ripple-fire 4

Ripple fire – This weapon has four shots. Recoil attacks may fire anywhere between one round and all remaining ammo. Blast templates from multiple shots must either overlap or share a common edge, and each receives its own attack roll.

Pulse Guns (x2)

AP: Steel — Range: Medium

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Autofire only, LAV, first 2 autofire attacks always trigger additional autofire attacks.

This is a twin-linked weapon; roll to attack once, but twice per hit for hit locations and damage results.

William Kwan (Quiz - 36 18/23)

GYRFALCON LEVV TRANSPORT

Movement type: Flight/VTOL
Speed Rating: 4

Risk Margin: 30
Mechanical Tolerance: 2
Primary Armour: Steel
Damage Threshold: Blast
Annihilation Threshold: Large Blast

Crew positions: Pilot, co-pilot, 2 gunners

Access points: Doors on both sides of the cabin

Weakness – Primary Lift Latticework
Difficulty / skill: *Engineering* [15]
Vulnerable to: All LAV weapons with an AP capable of defeating the primary armour.
Impact: The vehicle is forced to gradually descend (one range band per round) until it reaches a height no greater than 30cm (12") off the ground.

Description:
The Gyrfalcon (sometimes 'gear-falcon' to its crews) is a military-grade LEVV vehicle for deploying troops and vehicles to the field. It is used for both overland deployment and as a dropship from spacecraft loitering in the upper atmosphere.

While the vehicle uses similar Newtonian lattice technology to a civilian LEVV, the Gyrfalcon is as fast as a jet and controls like a conventional aircraft (with VTOL capability).

While in cruise flight, a Gyrfalcon can only be targeted by weapons with the AA quality. During take-off, landing, or hover, it is vulnerable to all weapons.

The Gyrfalcon is designed to carry modular payloads (see variants). A Gyrfalcon can land directly over one of its cargo modules and a simple action by one of the crew will engage the cargo locks. The same process can be used to deploy a cargo module.

A series of winches and hooks are available for custom loads. A swivel mounted pulse gun is mounted just aft of the cockpit on each side of the aircraft.

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT:

Flares

Off-turn action

Once per round, the vehicle can deploy flares to inflict 1d6 disadvantage versus an attack by a weapon with the AA quality. Flares must be deployed after the attack roll is made but before hit location or damage is determined.

Safety foam

In the event of a crash landing, the cabin floods with safety foam in a last-ditch effort to save the crew.

Safety foam provides 1d6 advantage to *endurance* checks to avoid injury during a crash. If the aircraft is annihilated in the crash, the foam provides no benefit.

WEAPONS

Ram

AP: Steel — Range: Melee

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Considered to have the blast property for vehicle damage.

Pulse Guns (x2)

AP: Steel — Range: Medium

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Autofire only, LAV, first 2 autofire attacks always trigger additional autofire attacks.

Variants:

Gyrfalcon-T (troops)
The Gyrfalcon troop carrier is a cargo cell containing twenty troops. Passengers sit back-to-back facing port and starboard of the aircraft. Both sides of the module open up into the ceiling to allow all soldiers to deploy, or recover, at once.

Gyrfalcon-L (logistics)
The logistics module is a simple cargo contaainer used for delivering food, ammunition, and other supplies to the field.

Gyrfalcon-M (medivac)
The medivac pod contains first aid and critical response supplies as well as room for two medics and ten patients. Death of a Hero checks and *medical* checks made to heal serious wounds receive 1d6 advantage in a medivac.

Gyrfalcon-R (rover)
The rover module contains an Enforcer or lighter ground vehicle in a suspension frame. The frame automatically releases when the module is deployed, allowing a vehicle to drive off immediately into battle.

For recovery, a vehicle need simply drive onto the frame. When a Gyrfalcon locks onto the module, the suspension frame will contract to safely secure the vehicle for transport.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

C-LEVV GUNSHIP

Movement type: Flight/VTOL
Speed Rating: 4

Risk Margin: 30
Mechanical Tolerance: 2
Primary Armour: Steel
Damage Threshold: Blast
Annihilation Threshold: Large Blast

Crew positions: Pilot, gunners

Access points: A slide back canopy accesses the cockpit where both crew sit in tandem.

Weakness – Primary Lift Latticework
Difficulty / skill: *Engineering* [15]
Vulnerable to: All LAV weapons with an AP capable of defeating the primary armour.
Impact: The vehicle is forced to gradually descend (one range band per round) until it reaches a height no greater than 30cm (12") off the ground.

Description:
Combat LEVV gunships are nimble attack aircraft designed to destroy enemy vehicles and strong points or provide close support for ground forces. The C-LEVV was in the process of being discontinued in favour of the Peacemaker when the Shatter hit.

Like the Gyrfalcon, this vehicle is as fast as a jet and controls more like a conventional aircraft (with VTOL capabilities) than a domestic LEVV.

While in cruise flight, a C-LEVV craft can only be targeted by weapons with the AA quality. During take-off, landing, or hover, it is vulnerable to all weapons.

Armaments consist of a ventral mounted twin barrelled pulse gun and a pair of rocket pods.

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT:

Flares

Off-turn action

Once per round, the vehicle can deploy flares to inflict 1d6 disadvantage versus an attack by a weapon with the AA quality. Flares must be deployed after the attack roll is made but before hit location or damage is determined.

Safety foam

In the event of a crash landing, the cabin floods with safety foam in a last-ditch effort to save the crew.

Safety foam provides 1d6 advantage to *endurance* checks to avoid injury during a crash. If the aircraft is annihilated in the crash, the foam provides no benefit.

WEAPONS

Ram

AP: Steel — Range: Melee

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Considered to have the blast property for vehicle damage.

Pulse Gun

AP: Steel — Range: Medium

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Autofire only, LAV, first 2 autofire attacks always trigger additional autofire attacks.

This is a twin-linked weapon; roll to attack once, but twice per hit for hit locations and damage results.

Rocket Pack (x2)

AP: Advanced Composite — Range: Long

Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated
[1]	[2–4]	[5]	[6]

Blast 15, ripple-fire 4

Ripple fire – This weapon has four shots. Recoil attacks may fire anywhere between one round and all remaining ammo. Blast templates from multiple shots must either overlap or share a common edge, and each receives its own attack roll.

William Kwan (Order: 36187234)

HULGARI HAMMERHEAD

Movement type: Flight
Speed Rating: 4 (atmosphere), 6 (space)

Mechanical Tolerance: 3
Primary Armour: Advanced Composites
Damage Threshold: Blast
Annihilation Threshold: Large Blast

Crew positions: Pilot

Access points: Raising canopy

Weakness – Aerodynamics
Difficulty / skill: *Engineering* [15]
Vulnerable to: This weakness cannot be targeted directly.
Impact: Any hit that damages the aircraft also disrupts its delicate aerodynamics. The pilot must make an immediate piloting [20] check or lose a range band of altitude. If the craft reaches the short-range band, it crashes.

Description:
When the Whisper hit, both the Hansei Planetary Defence Force and the Imperial Fleet had just completed sweeping modernisation projects. These programs saw the vast majority of combat aircraft replaced by unmanned Peacemaker drones. Almost without exception, these craft are now in control of the Whisper.

Fortunately, there remain a small number of manned strike jets still around. The most common of these is the Hulgari hammerhead, the Hulgari having never adopted what they saw as the human-driven shift to unmanned weapons platforms.

The hammerhead lacks many of the advantages of the Peacemaker. It's larger, uses a fuel-hungry plasma drive instead of solar charged batteries, and its lack of Newtonian lattice systems means it can only land at a prepared airstrip.

In a straight-up dogfight, however, the two craft are almost an even match. Better still, the Hulgari's avionics systems are completely separate from its communications. This means no advanced autopilot, but it also means the Whisper can't seize control of the aircraft.

A few brave pilots learnt early that weapons guidance systems *can* be seized by the Whisper, leading to the pilot slogan 'arm late, shoot fast'.

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT:

Flares

Off-turn action

Once per round, the vehicle can deploy flares to inflict 1d6 disadvantage versus an attack by a weapon with the AA quality. Flares must be deployed after the attack roll is made but before hit location or damage is determined.

Auto-eject system

Off-turn action

Should the vehicle suffer damage up to its mechanical tolerance, the pilot is automatically ejected from the aircraft. The ejector seat includes a parachute for atmospheric descent and an air recycler good for eight hours for vacuum drifts (though you must have your own pressure suit).

WEAPONS

Ram

AP: Steel		Range: Melee	
Clipped [1]	Fractured [2–3]	Shattered [4–5]	Pulverised [6]

Considered to have the large blast property for vehicle damage.

Pulse Gun

AP: Steel		Range: Medium	
Clipped [1]	Fractured [2–3]	Shattered [4–5]	Pulverised [6]

Autofire only, LAV, first 2 autofire attacks always trigger additional autofire attacks.

Apollo missile launcher

AP: Advanced Composite		Range: Extreme	
Singed [1]	Burned [2]	Charred [3–4]	Immolated [5–6]

Large Blast 15, AA, Ripple-fire 4, Risk Margin 10

Ripple fire – This weapon has four loaded shots. Recoil attacks may fire anywhere between one round, and all remaining ammo. Blast templates from multiple shots must either overlap or share a common edge and each receives its own attack roll.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

STARSHIPS

Starships are not like traditional land craft. Their dependence on integrated electronic systems runs from stem to stern, and there's no easy solution to remove or isolate them. This weakness, combined with their relative power, meant the Whisper claimed almost the entire Imperial Fleet for itself in the first days of the Shatter.

Civilian and corporate vessels didn't fare much better. Rumours persist of ships seen landing here or there, but gone are the vast fleets of commercial vessels that were once the lifeblood of wealth through the Verdant Crest.

Most of the ships that remain now are grounded in secret corporate or military caches. Some are forgotten, those who created them long dead or servants of the Whisper. Other ships are waiting for the moment when the necessity of their use outweighs the risk of their loss.

USING STARSHIPS IN YOUR CAMPAIGN

While you could dedicate an entire game system to the epic actions of grand starships, doing so in *Wireless Soul Transmission* will undermine the sense of desperation that defines the game. For most circumstances, the players are much better off with a small starship, too insignificant to attract the Whisper's malice, that they can use for transport and occasional fire support.

But this is not to say larger ships have no place in your campaign. Capital ships can build the tension of your story simply *because* they are so vulnerable to the Whisper. Every time the remnant of the Imperial Fleet or a corporate warship challenges the Whisper, the losses are irreplaceable. This can lend drama to the players' actions, e.g., the sacrifice of a full cruiser with hundreds of souls aboard just to draw the Whisper's attention away so four people can make planet fall.

As your campaign is coming into its final act, a space battle can make an excellent set piece – demonstrating that the heroes' allies are putting every last resource they have behind a desperate ploy. If the heroes fail, there'll be no chance of a repeat.

William Kwan (Quico - 2018/7/31)

Getting a Starship

With Aratayo's space port destroyed, the obvious repository of ships is no longer available. While there are rumours of crashed, abandoned and hidden starships in the city and beyond, finding a vessel is only half the battle.

Even a starship's multiband sensors can unintentionally perceive the Whisper, and these systems are critical since the human eye is insufficient when travelling at kilometres per second. This means that there is no way to harden a ship's basic flight systems from the Whisper, let alone complex weapons and shielding packages. There are only two solutions.

The first is inoculation. If the players can find even one Orikasa Fragment, it will firewall any ship it is carried aboard. In Allies Against the Whisper (see p.57) there are other entities that might provide some protection against the Whisper, and there is even a chance the players might come across a ship from the already-protected remnant of the Imperial Fleet.

The second is just having strong electronic defences and hoping for the best. Unless your players are absolutely desperate, they won't (and shouldn't) entertain such an option. To help make it more palatable, you can introduce theoretical systems that ***should*** substantially increase the ship's risk margin, perhaps changing the rolls against it from one per round to one per hour or day. A system like this could encourage the players to use their ship for short trips and then ground it as soon as possible.

CLASSES OF SHIP

There are multitudinous makes and models of starships, but they are divided into two simple categories for rules purposes.

Light Craft

By far, the vast majority of starships are light craft. This group of ships are the size of the twentieth century US Space Shuttle or smaller. In combat, they are nimble and able to evade most of the large calibre weaponry found on bigger vessels. Unless otherwise specified, light craft can only be targeted by weapons with the AA quality.

Not all light craft can execute a planar shift, but all light craft are able to make planetary landings.

While most capital ships are either government or corporate owned, a small number of wealthy private citizens owned light craft before the Shatter.

Capital Ships

Capital ships are operational hubs in space, ferrying vast complements of crew and material across the stars to explore, mine, help, or whatever purpose its designers may have intended. While capital ships cannot out-fly their smaller cousins, they have greater endurance, and those meant for combat are fiercely armed.

While capital ships can operate in the atmosphere, potentially providing devastating close air support, they cannot land except in a gravity craddle at a specially prepared spaceport. All capital ships are capable of planar shifts.

All capital ships also have space to carry at least one or more light craft. This allows the light craft to benefit from the capital ship's facilities and range, and the capital ship to use the light craft as a lander or shuttle.

SHIPS AS TRANSPORTATION

The addition of space travel can be transformational for your game. It allows your heroes to visit wild and new settings where they'll face atmospheres, terrains, and cultures completely divorced from those on the Earth-like Hansei.

Beyond that, having a ship that isn't immediately vulnerable to the Whisper will invite your heroes to a very exclusive club. The rarity of starships allows you to use space travel as a natural gateway in the evolution of the story – if you know three of the Orikasa Fragments are on other planets, then you know the players won't be going to recover them until you've given them the opportunity to acquire a ship.

Don't get too technical with your players

Below we talk about the technology behind conventional and interstellar travel. While we touch on certain speeds and distances, a GM should focus on the drama, not the math.

Consider this example: "The enemy blockade means a planar shift to the planet would be suicidal, except for a small craft using an unstable inlet to come in on the very edge of the atmosphere, but you'll need one hell of a pilot."

You'll find this touches on every element of what follows, but it never mentions a speed or a distance. Nonetheless it captures the problem those speeds and distances present and the solution the mechanics provide.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

The purpose of established guidelines for space travel, as in all *Wireless Soul Transmission*, is to prevent unintentional inconsistency. If you establish that a light craft can jump in 'underneath' a capital ship blockade, then your players will hold that truth for the rest of the game. If you're constantly changing your mind about what's possible and who can be outrun or outmanoeuvred, your players will disengage from the tension of the story.

Conventional Drives

Heavy ion engine and fusion reactor technology has meant that, compared to vessels of the twenty-first century, modern starships have almost limitless reaction mass and an abundance of power at their disposal. Hovering in the atmosphere, reaching orbital velocity, or straight out blasting free of Hansei's gravity are no real challenge for modern craft.

Yet despite this power, these engines would still take years just to reach the edge of a solar system. In practice, conventional drives are used to travel from a planar space insertion point to a planet's surface and vice versa.

Should a hard figure be needed, the cruise speeds for most starships range around two hundred kilometres per second, meaning a trip to the moon could be achieved in about a half hour (the Apollo missions took three days).

CONVENTIONAL DRIVE TRAVEL TIMES (FROM EARTH)

DESTINATION	DISTANCE (MILLIONS OF KM)	TRAVEL TIME
Earth's Moon	0.38	32 min.
1 AU	149	8.6 days
Mars (avg. distance)	225	13 days
solar edge/ heliosheath	13,851	2.2 years
Proxima Centauri	40,141,900	6,360 years
Hansei (Direct)	3,435 trillion	544,672 years

On a final note, even starships slow to speeds measured in kilometres per hour (not second) when in an atmosphere. Travelling at two hundred kilometres per second in atmosphere is impractical, both because of heat (this is twenty-five times faster than most re-entry speeds) and because you would never be in one place long enough to do anything. At two hundred kilometres per second, you could cross the continental United States in twenty seconds, blasting past a state every two seconds.

Planar Travel

Interstellar travel was unlocked through the discovery of the 'planar shift'. This relies on an additional dimension theorised, but undiscovered by twenty-first century human physics.

On this dimension, all commonly understood reality exists as a wavelength, and travel between points suffers from having to travel up each peak and down each valley. The planar shift engine uses tremendous energies to break a vessel 'off plane', allowing it to travel a direct line between any two points on the wavelength. The six millennia trip to Proxima Centauri is suddenly abbreviated down to a couple of hours.

The challenge of planar travel is that you can't approach too close to large gravity wells (see Perils of Planar Travel below). This means most capital ships arrive ten to fifteen minutes travel from the surface of their destination world.

Since these gravity wells make 'straight line' trips in planar space something of a rarity, the exact time it takes to make an interstellar journey is really up to the GM. For a hard figure, this method of travel reduces the distances involved by a factor of 25,300,000, meaning most ships can travel forty-five lightyears a day.

PLANAR SPACE TRAVEL TIMES (FROM HANSEI)

DESTINATION	LIGHTYEARS	TRAVEL TIME
Earth	427	9 Days, 12 hrs
Earth (Direct)*	363	8 Days, 2 hrs
Manheim	116	2 Days, 14 hrs
Hulgar	383	8 Days, 12 hrs
Near Edge of the Crest	90	2 Days
Farthest Edge of the Crest	862	19 Days, 4 hrs

* Impossible course that ignores gravity wells.

The Perils of Planar Travel

Combat can take place in planar space just as in normal space; however, this is not the only peril that planar travellers face.

While in planar space, current sensor technology is unable to detect gravity wells. This is critical because attempting to fly through a gravity well is very much like trying to sail a ship over an island. Before you are in any danger of striking the planet, you will 'run aground' on its gravity. The energy of this impact is tremendous, equivalent to 1d6 automatic hits that are assumed to breach a vessel's damage threshold.

The ship (or what's left of it) is ejected back to normal space, travelling at about twice its normal maximum

William Kwan (Quote: 36187234)

speed. In most cases, this gives the crew about seven or eight minutes before they impact the mass responsible for the gravity well they beached on. Assuming they still have power, this is ample time to slow down, and if they don't it is ample time to finalise their worldly affairs before being vapourised by the impact.

Taking Planar Shortcuts

With good charts and a navigational computer to account for stellar drift, it's pretty easy to plan routes that give gravity obstacles a wide berth.

But mascons, solar mass ejections, dark matter, and a variety of other phenomena mean that a small craft with a good pilot (or a capital ship with nothing to lose) can take drastic shortcuts. Passages and inlets spider through gravity wells of everything from asteroids to super stars and black holes. These can be used to drop out close or just to shave off time by cutting through an obstacle while others go around.

These passageways shift, and the only way to get through safely is through luck and 'listening for the scrapes on the hull', a harrowing endeavour that require steel trap reflexes, rigid self-control, and intuition.

In game terms, most transitions require 3 *luck* checks, on a 10 or higher, the ship has struck a side and takes a single hit sufficient to breach the vessel's damage threshold.

If the ship takes a hit, the pilot must then make a *pilot* [15] check to pull away from the wall or suffer d4 additional hits. If they fail this check, they then must make a *resist* [15] check to avoid panicking and overcorrecting. If they overcorrect, the ship is hurled back into real space as per normal (including the additional 1d6 hits).

SHIPS AS SETTING

Starships can make a great setting for both character-level combat and for dramatic story moments. A briefing in the nightingale floored courtroom aboard the flagship, lit by the swirling tempest of the gas giant the ship hides in. A desperate battle in the hangar over the last escape ships as the freighter is torn apart by the meteor storm the Whisper forced it into. Starving survivors explore a crashed assault ship for food, its hull creaking against the frozen sea outside.

Whatever your need, a starship can provide a dramatic, and frequently dynamic, setting for events. Consider the following to give your moments a stellar punch.

Outside is Beauty, Outside is Death

Starship are sealed environments, hardened against external environments that would kill a human in moments; it is a castle you can drive right into the heart of the storm and feel not a drop of rain.

This strength is very atmospheric if used as a backdrop. Metre-thick glass could offer your heroes views to vistas they could never otherwise experience. Let your creativity guide you to places of wonder too dangerous to otherwise visit, and set your epic shipboard battle (or search or meeting or even wedding) where the majesty and the danger is in full view.

This viewing box is also a prison in its way. Regardless of what horrors the players may share the decks with, they can't simply flee to the vacuum (or worse) outside. And of course, ships aren't as invulnerable as they often appear. Any setting aboard a ship that is damaged, breaking, or just so old as to be undependable, adds tension. A ship filling with corrosive gas as it sinks slowly into a Venusian world's crushing embrace has a very real time limit for the players' actions.

A Dynamic Environment

Sudden mechanical failures, changes in gravity, and internal defences springing to life to thwart intruders combine to give you a world of options to add to your adventures. Whether the heroes are battling their way through or just exploring, the environment can be their ally, their enemy, or just a random menace to all sides.

When creating a dynamic environment, pay heed to the consistency of your story. A ship flooding with water as it sinks into the ocean is a dramatic reminder of the peril outside as well as a sudden and interesting challenge in and of itself. The same event on a ship flying through space will seem contrived and out of place. Sometimes you can dodge this by having the ship's water reservoir flooding into the cabins, but it will lack the same punch and read of coincidence.

Your best bet is to have your dynamic events reflect forces that are acting on the ship – whether it's a desperate crew throwing obstacles in the players' path, something deadly outside trying to get in, or just aging construction and poor maintenance.

Who is in Control?

A ship is a functional entity, not an inert structure like a house. There are controls for the air, the engines, the gravity, the water, and every imaginable facet of these complex vessels. Many controls are on the bridge, but often these can be overridden at the machinery itself.

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The question of who is controlling these systems can be paramount, especially during a hostile boarding. This is doubly true in an environment where the Whisper is at play, potentially caring less for its own agents than it does about the players' demise.

Even systems that are out of control can be of huge concern. If the crew all died while the ship was under power, then where is it heading? If the crew abandoned the ship a year ago, and the air system hasn't been monitored, the entire vessel could be filled with high-oxygen compositions that could ignite at the slightest spark.

Avoid Boring Locations

Certainly, large ships are wondrous, but they're also full of tedious areas that make poor backdrops to your game. Bland corridors abound, as do barracks and cargo bays. Even interesting places might be so familiar from television as to have limited charm – your players have seen so many bridges and engineering sections that an engaging take could be difficult to achieve.

That's not to say you should avoid these locations in every case – sometimes the bridge is the only logical setting, and having the heroes wake with a start to realise their sleeping quarters are rapidly decompressing is certainly chilling. For most cases, however, try to find new and interesting settings on a starship. There are bunkered checkpoints protecting secure sites, silos of dangerous chemicals for the air and water recyclers, and machine rooms that drive the moving and loading of everything from elevators to fusion torpedoes. Very large ships can even have spaces on them a normal warship wouldn't – court halls, gardens, parade decks, and diplomatic lounges. Specialist ships will have on-board labs, factories, or refineries; almost any terrestrial function has an interstellar analogue.

As with anything, use your imagination but ensure your setting is cohesive with the events that take place there. The Fleet Admiral won't give the briefing from the ship's vast meat locker simply because it's more interesting than a conference room.

William Kwan (Quote: 36187234)

NARRATIVE BATTLES

Grand fleet battles with dozens or even hundreds of ships, can be an enticing idea for GMs and players alike. Before flipping forward to the combat rules, you should consider what's actually involved. Capital ships are not minions, they can take a lot of hits and make a lot of shots of their own. In a twenty ship battle, you could be making eighty attack and hit location rolls in a single round. Not only are your players' likely to lose interest while this is happening, but it is doubtful that this labour of maths reflects the glorious battle you had in mind.

Despite this, the awe-inspiring arrival of an Imperial cruiser over an entrenched battle, or an orbital invasion of a world almost completely enthralled by the Whisper are powerful, compelling scenes for an epic adventure.

For such signature moments, we recommend you let the battle unfold as a backdrop to the players' actions. Consider the below guidelines.

Narrative Combat

If the players aren't in a position to impact the battle, then there's no need for mechanics of any kind, just a few dramatic updates of the unfolding carnage. If the players are racing towards an extraction point while their air support tries to keep a window open for them, you shouldn't roll for every assault ship and battle cruiser in the sky. Instead, between rounds, explain the sky strobing with particle lances, a blanket of ash and clouds of fire that burn endlessly about an indecipherable knot of contrails. As their time starts to run out, they could spot more and more of their allies' fighters crashing down, each one going out in some small piece of heroic defiance against the Whisper.

Even if the players *are* going to impact the battle but are going to do it through a single decisive action, it is sometimes still best to use narrative combat. Not only is it easier to build the tension, it is less likely to backfire when taking down the shields or seizing that air defence gun didn't prove so pivotal after all.

The Grand Duel

For most campaigns, in any game system, it is not likely that the players will find themselves in command of a major capital ship. This, in itself, can make it an excellent move on the GM's part – surprising the players by daring to give them something potentially game breaking.

However it comes to pass, if your players *do* have access to a major vessel, you can combine the normal starship combat rules with a backdrop of a narrative fleet battle. The key here is that the players' battle should be in some way decisive for the greater battle – if the heroes can win their fight, then the greater engagement is likely to play out the same way

Overbleed

A powerful technique to use with narrative combat is having the narrative effects bleed over into the players' own engagement. If a ship crashes, have it crash in the middle of the heroes' car chase, if the ship the players are on suffers a hit, have it tear open a hole to space and force everyone to grab on before they're sucked through the breach. Don't overdo this, it shouldn't feel like every shot of the thirty-six-ship engagement passes through the 100 square metres directly over the players' heads, but make the events felt, not just heard and seen.

STARSHIP COMBAT

In most games, starship combat will not be a recurring feature – the survivors of *Wireless Soul Transmission* simply don't have the ships for high-intensity space conflict. For this reason, the rules in this chapter are designed to be streamlined, and as similar to vehicle combat rules as possible.

SPACE SCALE

Maps and Range

Like normal combat, space combat is played out on a map with a grid of squares. Here each tile represents much larger distances (the ground-based 'Extreme Range' bracket could fit within a single square).

Because the map is scaled up, space combat can operate under the same range bracket system as traditional combat. Short range is within 10 tiles, medium range being on the same board, and long/extreme range representing off board abstracts.

Blasts at space scale

All but the largest blast weapons only affect a single tile, even at space scale. In game terms only use the blast template for town-area blast weapons or larger.

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COMBAT BASICS

Movement in Combat

Like characters, starships have a listed movement speed, however such a figure doesn't factor in the vast differences in agility between a lumbering dreadnaught and a nimble starfighter.

For this reason, starships also have a speed rating (exactly as vehicles do). In combat the ships with the lowest speed rating must move about the board at thier listed movement speed. All other vessels can move to any square on the combat map as a normal move.

Like characters, a ship may not split its move (ie move, shoot and move again).

Ships Attacks and Defences

Unlike vehicles, where a single character's skill might determine the defences, piloting capabilities, and so forth, ships have fixed values. While these values are intended to reflect the presence of a relatively skilled crew, they also represent the influence the ship's construction has over those results.

Consider shooting skills – there is no 'eyeballing' a shot at a vessel a hundred thousand kilometres away moving at two hundred kilometres a second and making fifteen-G jink manoeuvres. A good crew helps, but it's the targeting system that makes or breaks the shot. Against such weapon, the defenders' survival will be in the hands of ECM systems, reactive armour, and raw engine power rather than a single skilled hand at the controls.

Ship Skills

Capital ships can have non-combat skills, such as *medical* and *engineering*. These skills represent the presence of crew members with training in those fields, and the operational equipment to support them. A vessel with an onboard workshop might have *engineering*, a flagship might have the *warcraft* skill.

These skills give you a quick way to determine a ship's ability to perform major projects in that field. If the players want to construct a space station or hack a satellite, all these elements are reflected

Allowable Actions

As with traditional combat, a GM should generally allow a player to attempt just about anything that could be conceivably attempted by a ship. Because of their crew, ships can normally perform any reasonable number of actions simultaneously.

Sneaking Around

Ships are able to detect anything immediately approaching long before it would reach combat range. However, with so many comets and other bodies moving rapidly through space, it is impractical to respond to everything that crosses your path. With this in mind ships hide more by being unremarkable than by being undetected.

In game terms ships may make *stealth* checks (opposed by *spot/listen*) to avoid combat entirely or slip into range for a decisive first shot, provided they aren't making course corrections or using any high-powered devices. For intercepts, it is reasonable to provide the defending ship 1d6 advantage to its detection roll since ships are particularly sensitive to objects on close-approach courses. Once a ship lights up its weapons and fires a shot, it is a blinding spot on sensors for the local opposition, and it can no longer attempt stealth.

Ships are also able to make use of pre-existing hiding spaces such as dust clouds, asteroids, planetary rings, and even just an approach with the sensor blinding brilliance of the sun behind you. As GM, you may decide exactly how difficult it is to spot a vessel in such hiding spaces.

CAPITAL SHIP WEAPONS

As established earlier, starships have access to a powerful array of offensive and defensive weapons, and most capital ships are equipped with a small arsenal in their own right. In practice, rolling for every particle lance and fusion torpedo a capital ship can sling out is tedious.

To streamline ship combat, capital ship weapons are grouped together into just one or two devastating attacks like 'Anti-ship Bombardment'. Many of these bombardment attacks include the autofire property to represent the volume of fire they can lay down (and note that starships do not use munitions for such attacks). Likewise, defensive systems like magnetic screens and FAST defence guns are summarised into just a handful of defensive talents.

If a warship has a complement of light craft and fighters these are represented as both attacks and defensive talents, reflecting that most ships carry both attack ships and defensive interceptors. This short hand prevents you from having to track dozens of small craft whose individual impact on the battle will be negligible, but who's combined force might be telling.

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There may be times when it may be relevant what particular armament a capital ship has at its disposal. You might wish to know if a patrol cruiser can make a fusion torpedo strike against a city, or if an escort carries a TC warhead. For this purpose, we still include an itemised list of ship weapons, and it is (of course) possible for a ship to use its individual weapons in a way that serves the narrative. Regardless, you should resist the temptation of having a ship use every particle lance as a separate weapon, even if it would be more effective.

Lastly, if you allow a ship to use its torpedoes as independant attacks, it's only fair that you also treat the targets FAST defence guns as *each* able to stop a torpedo per their entry on p.216.

Anti-ship weapon shortcuts

None of the vehicle-scale weapons have 'building-area blast' capability, and this creates a great shortcut for GMs since it means no such weapon can harm a capital ship at all.

Equally the 'Anti-ship Bombardment' attacks ***always*** have the building-area blast' which means both that it can harm (but not annihilate) capital ships and that it exceeds the annihilation threshold for light craft.

Should your campaign call for it, it's perfectly permissible to put a particle lance on a surface installation, or even a large vehicle. Such defence sites could be pivotal in your heroes adventure, but a weapon of that scale should not be lightly fielded and almost never turned on a ground target.

HIT LOCATIONS

Because of their size, ships have their own hit location table.

Unlike a human or a vehicle, it is impossible to guess at most of the internal mechanics of a starship from the outside. For this reason, many of the hit locations focus on visible external effect, rather than mechanical impact.

While some of the hit locations suggest a mechanical impact, it remains the GM's decision. That hit to the planar drives may have completely destroyed the system, or it may have just unleashed a torrent of cosmetic damage. Implementing mechanical impacts makes sense on two heroic vessels slugging it out (see 'the Grand Duel' p.230) but aren't usually worth the extra workload in multi-ship fights.

To identify a hit location, you roll an unmodified d20 on the following table:

ROLL	LOCATION
1	Shallow fractures in one flank
2	Cracked bow
3	Melted crater
4	Knocked towards nearest obstacle
5	Fragments sheering away
6	Ruptured cargo hold
7	Venting atmosphere
8	Multiple decks torn open
9	Shot right through breadthwise
10	Leaking fuel
11	On board fire
12	Bleeding coolant
13	Hangar
14	Unbalanced drives
15	Magnetic screen shatters
16	Primary armament
17	Internal explosions
18	Main engines
19	Planar shift engine
20	Reactor

Weaknesses

As a matter of simplicity, starships do not include weaknesses. The vehicle scale mechanic can be applied easily to the starships should you wish to make a weakness for your campaign's purposes.

Starships certainly have many systems that might qualify as weaknesses, delicate communications arrays, targeting systems, magnetic screen generators, and more could prove to be pivotal weaknesses on almost any capital ship.

DAMAGE RESULT

Exactly like vehicles and aircraft, a warship has a damage threshold and an annihilation threshold. This indicates the size of blast necessary to cripple one of the ship's systems (damage threshold) or destroy the vessel outright (annihilation).

Also, like vehicles, a starship has a mechanical tolerance score. Once a craft has suffered more damage results than its mechanical tolerance, the ship loses power and starts to drift. It does not explode, and surviving crew can be rescued.

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Heroic Starships

Since the players' starship is likely to be fairly irreplaceable, we recommend using their mechanical tolerance slightly differently. As established in the vehicle rules, a vehicle can suffer engine trauma to avoid a failed *drive* or *pilot* check that might result in its complete destruction (such as rolling off a cliff).

This is particularly useful with small ships that might be annihilated by a single shot from a capital ship, but even a large capital ship can be overwhelmed by a well-rolled autofire ship bombardment. In such a case, it makes sense to allow the players to suffer a point of engine trauma to avoid an attack and its autofire chain; burning the engines to escape that torpedo spread, or overdriving the shields to block a barrage of particle lances.

You may also choose to allow this method for vessels belonging to other allies and villains, but you should do so with care as it can look like favouritism.

Death of a Starship

Besides suffering more damage than its mechanical tolerance can sustain, there are a couple of ways a ship might be destroyed. Most common is abandonment – if a vessel has lost its primary armament, or is out matched and unable to escape, its crew may choose to surrender and/or abandon ship.

Beyond this, a hit to the reactor would logically leave a ship without power until repairs could be made. Equally a hit to the main engines (or again the reactor) while operating in the atmosphere, could send the ship crashing down to the planet's surface.

While we encourage you to be fluid with interpreting most hit location impacts, those which result in the immediate destruction of a ship should be adhered to fairly rigidly. If your players' ship crashed into a planet last week because of an engine hit, they won't want to hear that this week you're letting the villain suffer *two* engine hits before he's crashing into the ground.

DAMAGE AND REPAIRS

Any damage a ship suffers counts against a ship's mechanical tolerance until it is repaired. While ships might be able to perform patch-ups and jury rigging on the spot, they need a starship repair facility of some sort to repair the kind of lasting damage that affects mechanical tolerance.

Assuming access to such a facility, repairs still require time and parts.

Time

Most damage to a ship requires an *engineering* [effort 20] check to repair. Unlike vehicles, a starship repair check takes an entire day and requires a team of engineers (four to eight depending on their competence). If a player is leading the engineers, they may make the check using the player's skill.

Multiple teams can work simultaneously to repair multiple damage results in a single day, though a given player may only lead one team at a time.

Parts

Starships can only be repaired by consuming starship parts. The parts are integrated into the ship as a part of the repairs, so if a character wants to repair three damaged systems on a craft, they must have three sets of ship parts.

MORE HEROIC SPACE COMBAT

One of the biggest limiting factors of space combat is that it minimises the impact of the individual. In a game about a small coterie of plucky heroes, this isn't an ideal circumstance, and there are a few adjustments you can make to help with this.

Upscaling talents

Letting the players upscale some of their talents to affect entire ships, rather than just singular characters, can make the heroes into critical assets in the battle. Perhaps the system guardian's *decoy* could draw away an entire cruiser, or the disconnected could use there *I don't think it saw us* talent to keep the vessel hidden from the Whisper's patrol.

Some care needs to be taken with this approach. While a ginbushi using *heijoshin* to make a light craft jink near impossibly might be cool, doing the same with a battle cruiser would come across as silly. You'll also find some characters will have more talents that seem to apply than others (augmented in particular may find very little to do).

You may also wish to establish some sort of drastic cost to using a talent on a scale it was never intended for. Perhaps afterwards the character is so burnt out that

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they can't otherwise use that talent again until the beginning of the next session.

Experienced instruction

For skill checks (including attack rolls) you should generally let the heroes roll for their own ship. Going beyond that, you may also wish to let them use their ranks, rather than the crews, establishing that their expert training has upped the crew's game.

The Sum of our Parts

If you want the heroes' ship to truly come across as a force to be reckoned with, then you can have it attack (for capital ships) or attack and move (light craft) on every player's turn. Replace its mechanical tolerance with the sum of the heroes' wounds tolerances.

Suffice to say this can make even a small ship into an unstoppable engine of destruction. Rather than using this technique every time, consider saving it for a 'last march' style battle where the heroes have the last free ship and are betting it on a slim chance versus vastly superior odds.

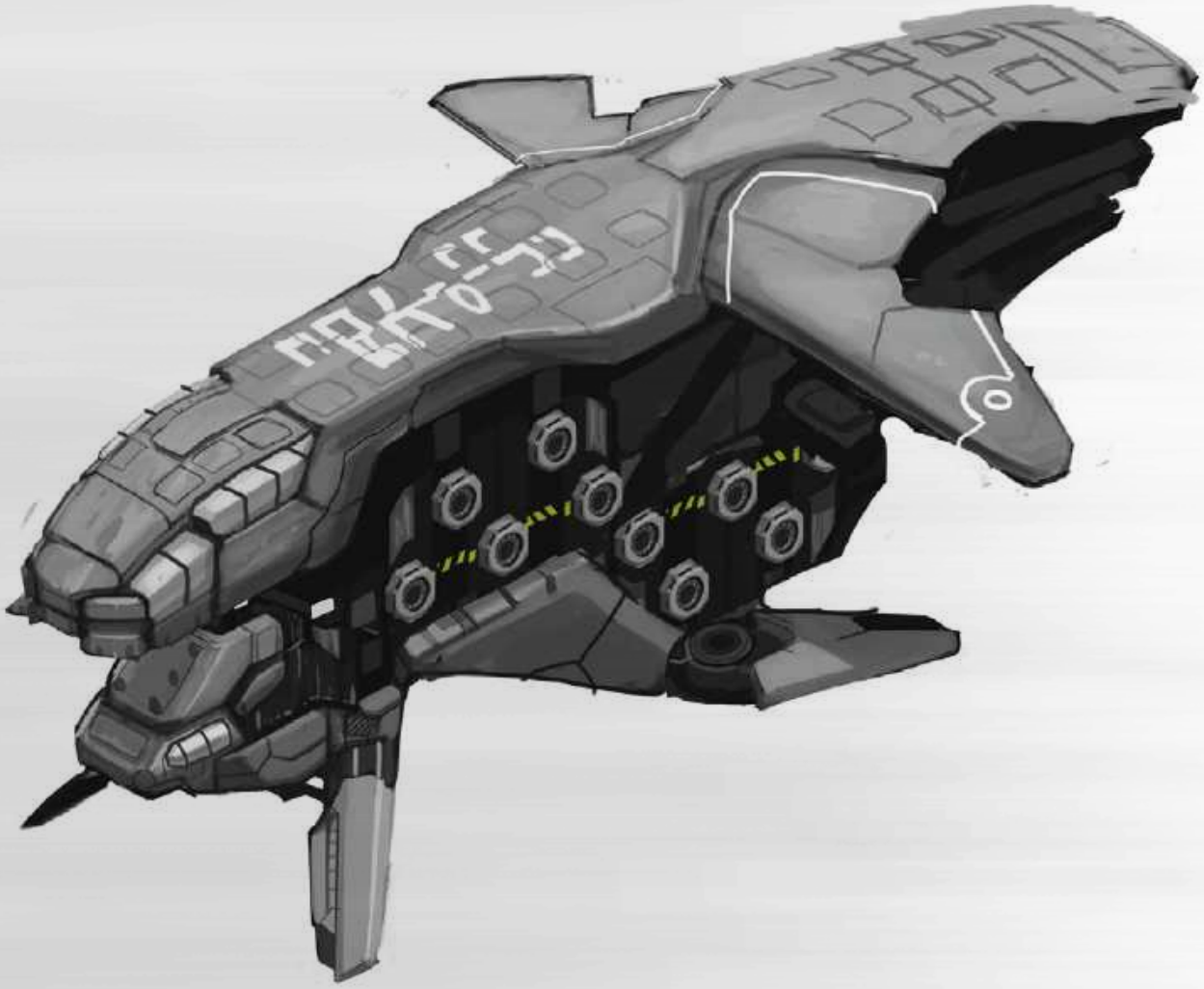
Precision Attack Run

The precision attack run is designed to take advantage of the fact that a 20 on the hit location table represents death (or at least disablement).

An attack run is setup by making a *pilot* [effort 20] check for light craft or a *warcraft* [effort 20] check for a capital ship. While setting up for this attack run, the ship may make normal attacks, but unless the craft is hidden, its target knows the setup is occurring.

On the round following the completed setup, the heroic vessel gains 1d6 advantage to hit and may select the hit location.

This method can also work well in concert with a stealth approach, allowing the players to manoeuvre in submarine-like and then remove the enemy's largest vessel before the fight even begins.



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STARSHIPS

Note all squares and range references in this chapter are at ship scale see p.230.

CARGO SCURRY

Class: Light Craft

Atmospheric Flight/Landing: No/No

Planar Shift Capability: No

Speed Rating: 3

Movement: 2 Squares

Skills: Basic +0, Unskilled +1

Skilled N/A

DEFENCES

Cover 5	Evade 10	Base 5
	IC 10	

Armour: Ceramic

Mechanical Tolerance: 2

Damage Threshold: Blast

Annihilation Threshold: Large Blast

Crew: Remotely controlled. Up to twenty passengers.

Description:

Cargo scurry is the informal name for the wide variety of remote controlled pod-like craft used for shuttling small cargo loads between ships (or between ships and stations). Cargo scurries have a relatively weak engine, suitable for precise docking manoeuvres, but not sufficient for long distances or atmospheric flight.

A cargo scurry has about the capacity of a shipping container. The pod is pressurised and can carry personnel, but it does not include oxygen recyclers, so passengers would need their own oxygen supply.

Because of their small size, a cargo scurry counts as a vehicle when stored in a hangar (despite its classification as a light craft). Most capital ships also have a listed pods complement that have dedicated docking ports (i.e., they don't require hangar space).

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +0	*Aim* +0	*Recoil* +0	*Melee* +0

WEAPON ATTACKS

Ram			
AP: Steel		Range: Melee	
Clipped [1]	Fractured [2]	Shattered [3–5]	Pulverised [6]
Considered to have blast property for vehicle damage.			

Variants:

Mining Pod
Built on the frame of a cargo scurry, mining pods are used for mining asteroids and other bodies with no atmosphere. A single pilot uses ultrasonic emitters to create fractures along imperfections in rock facings. Loose ores are recovered with a manipulator arm and towed back to a base ship or outpost.

Orbital Deployment Pod
ODPs are used to deploy single vehicles or infantry forces (twenty-man teams) to the surface of a planet where it would be too great a risk to send a larger craft. The pods are detached from a craft already moving at speed. Small thrusters kick the pod through a random evasive pattern as it moves through the atmosphere.

Once close enough to the surface a combination of a Newtonian Lattice and solid rocket motor kick in to decelerate the pod for a safe, if rough, landing. ODPs can be recovered and refurbished for future use, but they cannot, themselves, take off once landed.

Life pod
Life pods can support twenty individuals for up to a week without external support. The pod has only a single use escape drive for getting clear of the parent vessel. Should the pod need to enter an atmosphere, it does have rudimentary heat shielding and a Newtonian lattice to ensure safe landing.

PRIVATE YACHT

Class: Light Craft

Atmospheric Flight/Landing: Yes/Yes

Planar Shift Capability: Yes

Speed Rating: 5 (4 in atmosphere)

Movement: 7 Squares

Skills: Basic +2, Unskilled +3

Skilled (+6) in *pilot*

DEFENCES

Cover 5	Evade 10	Base 5
	IC 15	

Armour: Ceramic

Mechanical Tolerance: 4

Damage Threshold: Large Blast

Annihilation Threshold: Building-area Blast

Crew: 5 total - pilot, co-pilot, up to 3 stewards/house staff.
Not included in total: Up to four luxury passengers

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Description:

Few individuals were wealthy enough to own a personal ship before the Shatter. Such vessels were considered hallmarks of style, wealth, and excess.

These ships are intended to perform maintenance and repairs only in port. The lack of any engineers in the basic staff, meaning no damage control checks can be made.

The interior fit-out focuses on luxury over practicality. Each passenger has their own room. There is a common lounge and dining hall served by a small but well-appointed kitchen.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +0 *Aim* +0 *Recoil* +0 *Melee* +0

WEAPON ATTACKS

Ram			
AP: Ceramic		Range: Melee	
Clipped	Fractured [1]	Shattered [2–3]	Pulverised [4–6]
Considered to have the large blast property for vehicle damage.			

Variants:

Planet Hopper
The planet hopper is used by domestic space liners for short, low-capacity flights. They're often seen ferrying shift changes between planets and nearby orbital facilities or moon-based mining enterprises.

This craft replaces the luxury accommodations with simple rows of seating in a passenger bay. This increases the passenger capacity to thirty-five individuals – but only for short trips.

ASSAULT SHIP

Class: Light Craft

Atmospheric Flight/Landing: Yes/Yes

Planar Shift Capability: Yes

Speed Rating: 6 (4 in atmosphere)

Movement: 7 Squares

Skills: Basic +2, Unskilled +3

Skilled (+6) in *stealth, pilot*

DEFENCES

Cover 10 Evade 15 Base 5
IC 20

Armour: Advanced Composites

Mechanical Tolerance: 4

Damage Threshold: Large Blast

Annihilation Threshold: Building-area Blast

Crew: 15 total - 1 skipper, 1 watch officer, 2 pilots, 2 navigators, 1 communications officer, 2 technical engineers, 2 environmental engineers, 4 weapons officers.

Space for an embarked platoon (24–32 troops)

Description:

Assault ships were designed to easily bridge the gap between ground and space operations. There are a multitude of different designs and manufacture, from the Hansei-built Gosraven to the Imperial Fleet's A-29 assault lander.

Though it is capable of planar jumps, it has no berthing space for its embarked troops (only rack seating). The normal weapons configuration has two turreted energy cannons, one on the top and one on the underside of the vessel. The missiles are usually four each to a rack on the wings.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +5 *Aim* +5 *Recoil* +5 *Melee* +5

WEAPON ATTACKS

Ram			
AP: Adv. Composite		Range: Melee	
Clipped	Fractured [1]	Shattered [2–3]	Pulverised [4–6]
Considered to have the large blast property for vehicle damage.			

Energy Cannons x2			
AP: Adv. Composite		Range: Short	
Singed [1]	Burned [2]	Charred [3–4]	Immolated [5–6]
Blast 20			

Apollo Missile Launcher			
AP: Adv. Composite		Range: Medium	
Singed [1]	Burned [2]	Charred [3–4]	Immolated [5–6]
Eight shots only, Large blast 15, AA, ripple fire Ripple fire allows the vehicle to fire up to all eight missiles in a single round. They may spread across targets, provided at least one edge of the blast areas touches or overlaps.			

Variants:

Short Range Assault Ship
Because many configurations of assault ships operate from larger capital ships, cheaper variants have been produced that do not carry a planar shift drive.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

Torpedo-armed Assault Ships

The assault ship makes an excellent craft for your players to move about the Verdant Crest in. It's fast, specialised for troop deployments, and has enough armament to provide devastating fire support in a pinch.

What it lacks is the ability to threaten even a small capital ship. Early game, this is an asset, as it presents a clear warning to players that they shouldn't be trying to tackle the first cruiser that shows up. Later in the game, however, you may *want* your heroes to take on a warship in a desperate gambit. In such a case, it is quite feasible for the Apollo missiles of the assault ship to be removed and replaced with a single fusion torpedo. Combined with the 'precision attack run' p.234, this can create a tense moment with an epic outcome.

Such an armament need not be confined to the assault ship either, in a pinch it could be equipped on any light craft to similar effect.

TRAMP FREIGHTER

Class: Light Craft

Atmospheric Flight/Landing: Yes/Yes

Planar Shift Capability: Yes

Speed Rating: 5 (4 in atmosphere)

Movement: 5 Squares

Skills: Basic +1, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+3) in *pilot*

DEFENCES

Cover 5	Evade 10	Base 5
	IC 10	

Armour: Ceramic

Mechanical Tolerance: 4

Damage Threshold: Large Blast

Annihilation Threshold: Building-area Blast

Crew: 3 total - 1 pilot, 1 co-pilot, 1 technical engineer. Not included in total: up to five passengers

Description:

Tramp freighters handle small, one-time cargos. Shipments too valuable to be ignored but too small to merit a full-scale freight liner.

Most tramp freighters can carry around six standard shipping containers or equivalent volume in bulk cargo.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +0	*Aim* +0	*Recoil* +0	*Melee* +0

WEAPON ATTACKS

Ram			
AP: Ceramic		Range: Melee	
Clipped	Fractured [1]	Shattered [2–3]	Pulverised [4–6]
Considered to have large blast property for vehicle/ship damage.			

ESCORT

Class: Capital Ship

Atmospheric Flight/Landing: No/No

Planar Shift Capability: Yes

Speed Rating: 5

Movement: 5 Squares

Skills: Basic +2, Unskilled +3

Skilled (+6) in *pilot, engineering*

DEFENCES

Cover 15	Evade 10	Base 5
	IC 20	

Armour: Advanced Composites

Mechanical Tolerance: 4

Damage Threshold: Building-area Blast

Annihilation Threshold: Town-area Blast

Crew: 76 total - 7 command and admin, 1 intelligence, 14 weapons, 5 navigation & helm, 5 communications, 3 radar and tracking, 5 flight ops, 7 technical engineering, 9 environmental engineering, 3 drive engineering, 8 domestic services, 5 medical, 4 logistics

Pods: 2 cargo scurries, 4 life pods

Description:

These light capital ships were designed to be a cheap alternative to cruisers that could provide fire support or escort for military convoys. One-on-one an escort is no match for a cruiser, but they are very capable of discouraging assault ships.

Unlike many capital ships, escorts are not designed to enter the atmosphere at all. With no heat shielding, they would have to descend dangerously slowly and would need to do so 'on end' due to their lack of Newtonian lattice pods.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +5	*Aim* +5	*Recoil* +5	*Melee* +5

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TALENTS

Magnetic Screen

This ship is equipped with a directional magnetic screen. Any attack on the vessel through the field must use the ship's *cover* defence.

The field only protects one of the vehicle's six main facings (front, left, right, rear, above, below) at any time. As a simple action, the ship may change the facing of the magnetic screen.

Light Defence Battery

On a Luck [10] check this ship may ignore the first successful torpedo, raid or anti-ship bombardment attack directed at it. This may be used once per round.

2 FAST defence guns.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Ram

AP: Adv. Composite		Range: Melee	
Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised [1-6]

Considered to have building-area blast property for vehicle/ship damage.

Light Anti-ship Bombardment

AP: Amorphous Metal		Range: Medium	
Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated [1-6]

Building-area Blast 20, AA

2 particle lances, 1 Apollo missile launcher

CIVILIAN CRUISER

Class: Capital Ship

Atmospheric Flight/Landing: Yes/No

Planar Shift Capability: Yes

Speed Rating: 4 (3 in atmosphere)

Movement: 5 Squares

Skills: Basic +2, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+3) in *pilot, engineering*

DEFENCES

Cover 10	Evade 5	Base 0
	IC 15	

Armour: Advanced Composites

Mechanical Tolerance: 4

Damage Threshold: Building-area Blast

Annihilation Threshold: Town-area Blast

Crew: 14 total - 1 captain, 1 watch officer, 2 helmsman, 1 navigator, 2 technical engineers, 2 environmental engineers, 1 drive engineer, 1 load master, 2 load hands, 1 domestic services officer.

Pods: 4 Cargo scurries, 1 life pod

Hangar: 1 planet hopper and a variety of trucks and civilian cars.

Description:

Much lighter than their military equivalents, civilian cruiser hulls are the basis for a huge variety of specialist commercial vessels. Mobile labs, survey vessels, hospital ships, and passenger liners are all built from varieties of this streamlined hull.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +0 *Aim* +0 *Recoil* +0 *Melee* +0

Talents

Magnetic Screen

This ship is equipped with a directional magnetic screen. Any attack on the vessel through the field must use the ship's *cover* defence

The field only protects one of the vehicle's six main facings (front, left, right, rear, above, below) at any time. As a simple action, the ship may change the facing of the magnetic screen.

Weapon Attacks

Ram

AP: Adv. Composite		Range: Melee	
Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised [1–6]

Considered to have building-area blast property for vehicle/ship damage.

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PALADIN AEROSTAT

Class: Capital Ship

Atmospheric Flight/Landing: Yes/Yes

Planar Shift Capability: No

Speed Rating: 2 (atmosphere only)

Movement: 3 Squares

Skills: Basic +2, Unskilled +3

Skilled (+6) in *pilot, engineering*

DEFENCES

Cover 15	Evade 10	Base 5
	IC 20	

Armour: Advanced Composites

Mechanical Tolerance: 3

Damage Threshold: Building-area Blast

Annihilation Threshold: Town-area Blast

Crew: 203 total - 2 command and admin, 9 weapons, 4 navigation & helm, 5 communications, 2 radar and tracking, 3 flight ops, 4 technical engineering, 3 environmental engineering, 3 drive engineering, 6 domestic services, 5 medical, 4 logistics, 55 stewards, butler, maids and support personal for the luxury module, and 98 crew & support personnel for hangar module. Not included in total: up to 50 VIPs.

Pods: None

Hangar: 6 Gyrfalcons, 4 C-LEVVs, 4 Enforcer urban combat vehicles, 4 tactives, and a variety of trucks and civilian cars.

Description:

Modern aerostats are large armoured aircraft that use Newtonian lattices to allow flight times that stretch for months without refuelling. The Paladin model is designed to ferry a cabal of powerful individuals around with a combination of luxury and intimidating firepower.

Despite being in the starship section, an aerostat is only capable of atmospheric flight, but its scale gives it more in common with a capital ship than a terrestrial vehicle.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +5	*Aim* +5	*Recoil* +5	*Melee* +5

TALENTS

Magnetic Screen

This ship is equipped with a directional magnetic screen. Any attack on the vessel through the field must use the ship's *cover* defence.

The field only protects one of the vehicle's six main facings (front, left, right, rear, above, below) at any time. As a simple action, the ship may change the facing of the magnetic screen.

Light Defence Battery

On a Luck [10] check this ship may ignore the first successful torpedo, raid or anti-ship bombardment attack directed at it. This may be used once per round.

2 FAST defence guns.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Ram

AP: Adv. Composite — Range: Melee

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised [1–6]

Considered to have building-area blast property for vehicle/ship damage.

Light Anti-ship Bombardment

AP: Amorphous Metal — Range: Medium

Signed	Burned	Charred	Immolated [1–6]

Building-area Blast 20, AA

2 particle lances, 1 Apollo missile launcher

Variants:

Cargo Aerostat

Cargo aerostats are an unarmed version of the Paladin aerostat used where large volumes of surface shipping are necessary and terrain does not favour any form of surface transportation.

This variant removes the weapons, hangar, and VIP capacity, and replaces it with a hold capable of moving approximately 5,000 standard shipping containers worth of cargo.

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STARSHIPS THAT AREN'T STARSHIPS

The Paladin is included here largely as a demonstration of a non-starship starship. There are a handful of such terrestrial vehicles that are so large that typical vehicle rules don't quite grasp them: trains, waterborne ships, and so forth. Even a surface fortress could potentially use a starship template.

In general, anything that has more than one or two internal rooms is probably better served by making a starship template for it, rather than attempting to use vehicle rules.

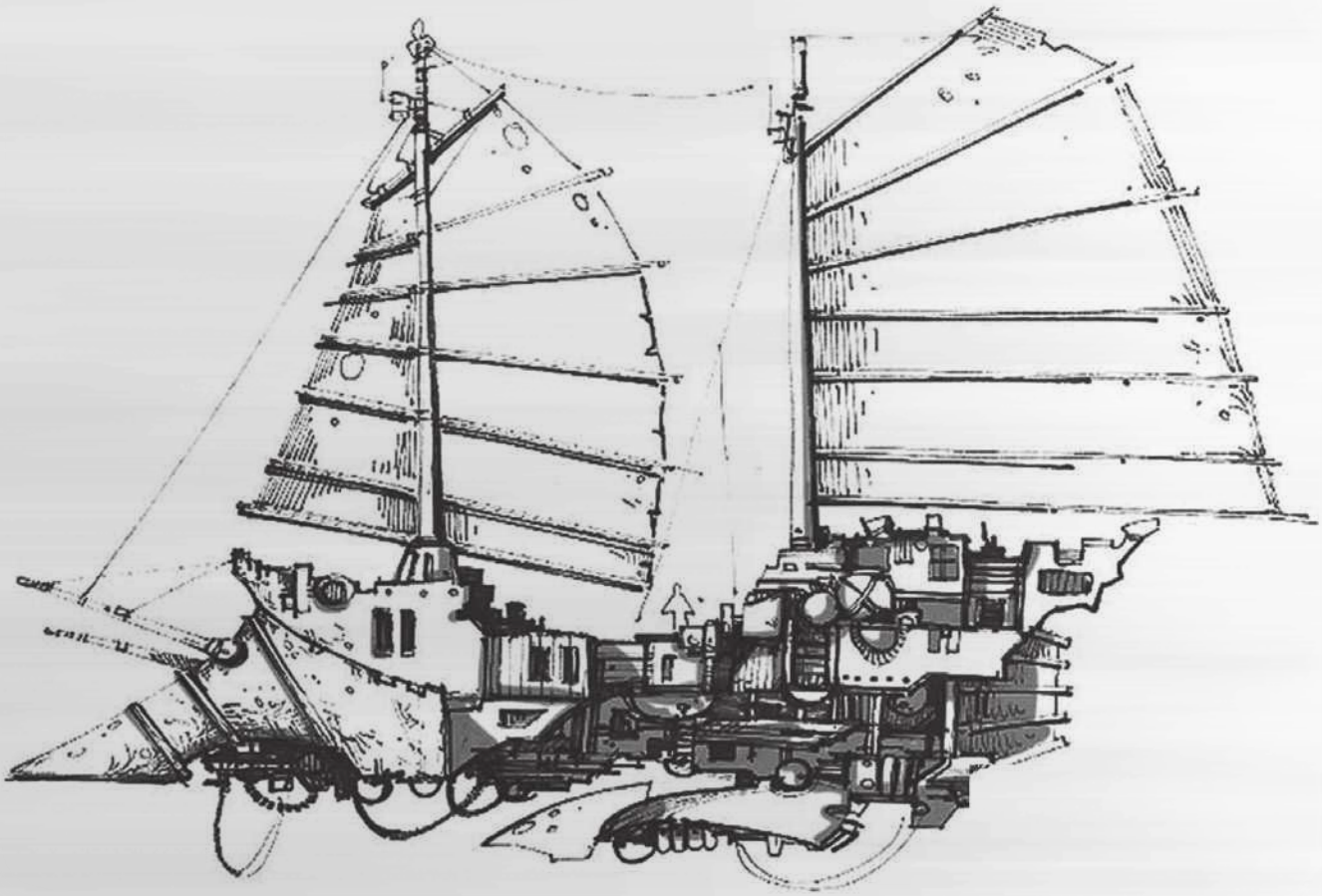
Before you leap off making a starship template for every building (and even every actual starship) in your campaign, think about whether your craft is a combatant or a setting. That is to say, will the players be fighting *against* it, or just *within* or around it.

If it's the latter, you really don't need to bother with a full write-up – or rather your write-up should focus more on those things that make an interesting setting. If the players are trying to salvage something off a hover train that's overrun with berserkers, don't worry about the mechanical tolerance and cover defence of the craft. Instead give it some other interesting details.

Where can the players force their way aboard? Are they dropping from a C-LEVV or chasing it down on local horse-analogues so the Whisper can't sense them? How do you get between carriages? Is there a point where the normal crossing is torn up and the heroes have to improvise or take a leap of faith? What's the aesthetic design look like (particularly of the interior)?

Instead of trying to figure out how the players will get past a FAST defence gun, have them suspiciously inactive (or disabled by an ally but only for x-rounds). Perhaps one of the carriages the heroes need to proceed past has a tarpaulin covering a Peacemaker in sleep mode.

All of these details add tension and texture to a setting but would be overkill for a train that you just expect the players to light up from orbit with a fusion torpedo. Use the right tool for the right job.



William Kwan (Order #36487234)

PATROL CRUISER

Class: Capital Ship

Atmospheric Flight/Landing: Yes/No

Planar Shift Capability: Yes

Speed Rating: 5 (3 in atmosphere)

Movement: 3 Squares

Skills: Basic +3, Unskilled +4

Skilled (+6) in *spot/listen, computer use, engineering, medical, warcraft*

DEFENCES

Cover 20	Evade 10	Base 5
	IC 20	

Armour: Amorphous Metal

Mechanical Tolerance: 6

Damage Threshold: Building-area Blast

Annihilation Threshold: Town-area Blast

Crew: 565 total - 12 command and admin, 5 intelligence, 24 weapons, 7 navigation & helm, 17 communications, 10 radar and tracking, 18 flight ops, 17 technical engineering, 17 environmental engineering, 5 drive engineering, 27 domestic services, 17 medical, 25 logistics, 181 crew & support personnel for hangar modules, 183 crew and support personnel for shipboard hospital.

Not included in total: up to 1,000 embarked marines or passengers

Pods: 6 Cargo scurries, 30 life pods

Hangar: 2 assault ships, 8 Gyrfalcons, 20 Peacemakers, 8 enforcer urban combat vehicles, and 4 tactives

Description:

Imperial patrol cruisers are the capital ship most citizens would be familiar with during peace time. These large and complex vessels roam the Empire on long tours, bringing their significant resources to bear wherever it is needed – assisting civilian ships with repair, providing disaster relief, aiding with medical emergencies and pirate hunting are just a few of the roles patrol cruisers are called on to meet.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +10	*Aim* +10	*Recoil* +10	*Melee* +10

TALENTS

Magnetic Screen

This ship is equipped with a directional magnetic screen. Any attack on the vessel through the field must use the ship's *cover* defence

The field only protects one of the vehicle's six main facings (front, left, right, rear, above, below) at any time. As a simple action, the ship may change the facing of the magnetic screen.

Defence Battery

This ship may ignore the first successful torpedo, raid or anti-ship bombardment attacks directed at it each round.

8 FAST defence guns.

Screening Fighters and Light Craft

This ship may ignore two successful torpedo, raid or anti-ship bombardment attacks directed at it each round. This is in addition to any protection provided by a defence battery.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Ram

AP: Amorphous Metal — Range: Melee

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised [1–6]

Considered to have building-area blast property for vehicle/ship damage.

Anti-ship Bombardment

AP: Amorphous Metal — Range: Long

Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated [1–6]

Building-area Blast 20, AA, Autofire

5 Particle lances, 2 Fusion torpedoes

Light Craft and Bomber Raid

AP: Amorphous Metal — Range: Extreme

Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated [1–6]

Building-area Blast 20, AA, Autofire

This attack is indirect and may be launched against any facing of the target.

William Kwan (Quno - 36187234)

BATTLE CRUISER

Class: Capital Ship

Atmospheric Flight/Landing: Yes/No

Planar Shift Capability: Yes

Speed Rating: 5 (3 in atmosphere)

Movement: 3 Squares

Skills: Basic +2, Unskilled +3

Skilled (+8) in *spot/listen, warcraft*

DEFENCES

Cover 25	Evade 10	Base 5
	IC 25	

Armour: Amorphous Metal

Mechanical Tolerance: 8

Damage Threshold: Building-area Blast

Annihilation Threshold: Town-area Blast

Crew: 389 total - 12 command and admin, 5 intelligence, 31 weapons, 7 navigation & helm, 17 communications, 10 radar and tracking, 18 flight ops, 17 technical engineering, 17 environmental engineering, 5 drive engineering, 27 domestic services, 17 medical, 25 logistics, 181 crew & support personnel for hangar modules.

Not included in total: Up to 1,000 embarked marines or passengers

Pods: 4 Cargo scurries, 17 life pods

Hangar: 1 assault ship, 4 Gyrfalcons, 10 Peacemakers, 4 Enforcer urban combat vehicles, and 2 tactives

Description:

Battle cruisers are the main frontline combat vessel of the Imperial Fleet. A battle cruiser is significantly more expensive than a patrol cruiser, but also better armed and more resilient. Their one weakness compared to a typical patrol cruiser is a lower range, usually requiring resupply every two weeks to maintain full combat effectiveness.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +10	*Aim* +10	*Recoil* +10	*Melee* +10

TALENTS

Magnetic Screen

This ship is equipped with a directional magnetic screen. Any attack on the vessel through the field must use the ship's cover defence

The field only protects one of the vehicle's six main facings (front, left, right, rear, above, below) at any time. As a simple action, the ship may change the facing of the magnetic screen.

Defence Battery

This ship may ignore the first successful torpedo, raid or anti-ship bombardment attack directed at it each round.

8 FAST defence guns.

Limited Screening Fighters and Light Craft

This ship may ignore one successful torpedo, raid or anti-ship bombardment attack directed at it each round. This is in addition to any protection provided by a defence battery.

Weapon Attacks

Ram

AP: Amorphous Metal — Range: Melee

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised [1–6]

Considered to have Building-area blast property for vehicle damage.

Heavy Anti-ship Bombardment

AP: Amorphous Metal — Range: Long

Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated [1–6]

Building-area blast 20, AA, Autofire

May turn two failed combo rolls into hits that also trigger an additional attack.

8 Particle lances, 4 Fusion torpedoes

Limited Light Craft and Bomber Raid

AP: Amorphous Metal — Range: Extreme

Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated [1–6]

Building-area blast 20, AA

This attack is indirect and may be launched against any facing of the target.

Variants:

Antimatter-equipped Battlecruiser

A handful of battlecruisers carry the BC-XAX designation, indicating they carry one or more TC warheads. These ships are protected by special Fleet Mobile Infantry units, and their captains have strict instructions to see the vessel destroyed before letting the warheads be captured.

In most cases, these measures proved ineffective versus the Whisper. Fortunately, it has not, so far, deployed any of these super weapons against the Verdant Crest.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

FREIGHTLINER

Class: Capital Ship

Atmospheric Flight/Landing: Yes/No

Planar Shift Capability: Yes

Speed Rating: 4 (3 in atmosphere)

Movement: 3 Squares

Skills: Basic +2, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+8) in *pilot, engineering*

DEFENCES

Cover 10	Evade 5	Base 0
	IC 10	

Armour: Advanced composites

Mechanical Tolerance: 4

Damage Threshold: Building-area Blast

Annihilation Threshold: Town-area Blast

Crew: 14 total - 1 captain, 1 watch officer, 2 helmsman, 1 navigator, 2 technical engineers, 2 environmental engineers, 1 drive engineer, 1 load master, 2 load hands, 1 domestic services officer.

Pods: 2 cargo scurries, 1 life pod

Description:

Freightliners are among the largest ships coasting through planar space. They follow specific, recurring 'lines', shipping huge volumes of known goods for the dependable profits necessary to sustain and justify their considerable running costs.

Freightliners tend to pare everything down to the bare minimum, fuel, spare parts, crew, even atmosphere. Since the Shatter, there are countless freightliners either drifting endlessly or mindlessly continuing their old routes while their cargo and crew rots away within.

Most super freighters have eight holds and a total cargo capacity exceeding 20,000 standard shipping containers.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +0	*Aim* +0	*Recoil* +0	*Melee* +0

Weapon Attacks			
Ram			
AP: Adv. Composite		Range: Melee	
Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised [1–6]
Considered to have building-area blast property for vehicle/ship damage.			

FLAGSHIP

Class: Capital Ship

Atmospheric Flight/Landing: Yes/No

Planar Shift Capability: Yes

Speed Rating: 5 (3 in atmosphere)

Movement: 3 Squares

Skills: Basic +3, Unskilled +5

Skilled (+9) in *spot/listen, computer use, engineering, medical, warcraft*

DEFENCES

Cover 25	Evade 10	Base 5
	IC 25	

Armour: Amorphous Metal

Mechanical Tolerance: 24

Damage Threshold: Building-area Blast

Annihilation Threshold: Country-area Blast

Crew: 1,544 total - 35 command and admin, 23 intelligence, 45 weapons, 7 navigation & helm, 27 communications, 10 radar and tracking, 22 flight ops, 51 technical engineering, 51 environmental engineering, 11 drive engineering, 59 domestic services, 39 medical, 49 logistics, 724 crew & support personnel for hangar modules, 183 crew and support personnel for the hospital module, 110 stewards, butler, maids and support personal for the court and luxury modules, 98 crew and support personnel for the cargo modules.

Not included in total: up to 1,000 embarked marines or passengers

Pods: 10 cargo scurries, 70 life pods

Hangar: 8 assault ships, 20 Gyrfalcons, 20 Peacemakers, 20 Chevalier autonomous battle tanks, 40 Enforcer urban combat vehicles, 40 tactives, and 20 free spaces for visiting vehicles or 1 light craft.

Description:

Flagship-class vessels are a controversial component of the Imperial military that has never quite gone away. Vast and expensive, they operate as a psychological and strategic anchor for entire regional fleets.

Most opponents of the Empire aren't willing to fight a Flagship-class vessel (let alone its attendant fleet) and word of the arrival of such as ship has caused whole battlegroups to surrender in the past.

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But the only admirals to have led these ships into battle in the last decade have expressed their frustration. In their eyes, a flagship is too big to risk in battle and so becomes an extremely expensive and unnecessary mobile shipyard.

There were exactly two flagship class vessels in the Verdant Crest at the time of the Shatter, the *Schwert von Skye* and the *Rustung der Kostenlos*.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +10 *Aim* +10 *Recoil* +10 *Melee* +10

TALENTS

Magnetic Screen

This ship is equipped with a directional magnetic screen. Any attack on the vessel through the field must use the ship's *cover* defence.

The field only protects one of the vehicle's six main facings (front, left, right, rear, above, below) at any time. As a simple action, the ship may change the facing of the magnetic screen.

Defence Battery

This ship may ignore the first successful torpedo, raid or anti-ship bombardment attacks directed at it each round.

8 FAST defence guns.

Screening Fighters and Light Craft

This ship may ignore two successful torpedo, raid or anti-ship bombardment attacks directed at it each round. This is in addition to any protection provided by a defence battery.

Internal Shipyard

The flagship-class vessel is large enough that Imperial cruisers, battlecruisers, and escorts can dock in an internal dry-dock. They are considered 'in port' for the purposes of repairs, but the flagship may continue to operate (and even enter combat) as normal.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Ram

AP: Amorphous Metal		Range: Melee	
Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised [1–6]

Considered to have Building-area blast property for vehicle damage.

Heavy Anti-ship Bombardment

AP: Amorphous Metal		Range: Long	
Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated [1–6]

Building-area blast 20, AA, Autofire

May turn two failed combo rolls into successes.

8 particle lances, 4 fusion torpedoes

Beam Cannon

AP: Archite		Range: Long	
Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated [1–6]

Town-area blast 25

Light Craft and Bomber Raid

AP: Amorphous Metal		Range: Extreme	
Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated [1–6]

Building-area blast 20, AA, autofire

This attack is indirect and may be launched against any facing of the target.

TC Warhead

AP: -		Range: Extreme	
Signed	Burned	Charred	Immolated [1–6]

A total conversion warhead completely annihilates any target it hits, from a starship to a planet. See p.217.

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William Kwan (Quiro - 2018/7/31)

PART VI

MONSTERS, VILLAINS, AND ALLIES

READING STAT BLOCKS

Because a GM needs to keep track of numerous opponents, it pays to keep details as compact as possible. The adversaries in this section are much simplified compared to a hero's character sheet.

There are also summary tables located in Appendix IV p.320 that will provide a useful reference once you're generally familiar with the adversaries you wish to use.

Skills
A template lists the skills a foe is proficient at. These use the 'Skilled' value as a modifier. All others use unskilled (if they are advanced skills) or basic (for basic skills).

Wounds Tolerance
Wounds Tolerance works as established in the *Play Guide*, but one circumstance warrants clarification. Some characters have '0' wounds tolerance, and it should be noted that this is not the same as having 'minion' wound tolerance.

Unlike minions, characters with '0' wounds tolerance do not increase the category of injuries taken. As such they might take any number of hits that result in minor wounds or equally might get unlucky and be killed by a single maiming injury.

Attack Skills
When using weapons, characters may use all the normal attacks (*aimed* shots, autofire, etc.). Additionally, many creatures have talents, and the action required for these will be listed in the entry.

Unless otherwise specified, the allowances for movement and actions on opponents are identical to those of the players.

Range
Try not to get caught up on the range of weapons. The vast majority of weapons and abilities used by monsters are either medium ranged or melee. Since medium range can hit anywhere on the map, you shouldn't have to worry about range most times.

Augmentation
Most augmentations are about increasing a character's physical trait maximums. Since we never see opponents level up, such details are not hugely relevant. The fact that an opponent has 12 build might matter, the fact that he got there through a pair of Hercules arms is just background.

That said augmentations can help add character to an opponent. A surly bouncer with a glowing cybernetic eye that stares, with unblinking intensity, at each nervous customer is a lot more interesting than just a surly bouncer. For this reason we've touched on the most common augmentations that might be found on opponents.

Your players may also be quite willing to perform some post-mortem field surgery to recover these augmentationts. The only time you should discourage this is in the case of Whisper Agents where there are well known risks (see p.210 for more).

CAN MY HEROES FIGHT THIS THING?

For each group (the Whisper, the corporations and the survivors) we've ordered the entries by approximate difficulty to fight. Before depending on this too much, it is important to recognise how asymmetrical combat in Wireless Soul Transmission can be.

For example: we'd generally recommend the banshee as an opponent for later game groups, but if your group is comprised entirely of system guardians with Hades firewalls, such a foe might be easily overcome even early on. Conversely, a party of level twelve augmented might find themselves practically defenceless versus a foe with no tangible form.

In general, we recommend keeping an eye on three things:

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Highest Attack Skill
In general, the highest attack skill of an adversary can broadly be considered its 'equivalent level'. A true ronin's +10 melee skill suggests it would badly overmatch a level 2 player group.

For opponents that use wireless attacks (like suzerains) use the highest bonus on their wireless attacks as 'equivalent level'.

Killing requirements
Assuming they're able to hit it, do the players have the means to actually kill this adversary? Consider: an oni has steel armour, Chevaliers and collectors are only vulnerable to blast weapons, a banshee can only be defeated by wireless attacks, true ronin can only be defeated by a high volume of accurate fire. If your players simply don't *have* the weaponry (digital or otherwise) to harm an opponent, careful consideration should be given before including one in a fight.

There are many ways to engage an opponent, and an improvisational party might surprise you by blinding a Chevalier without needing blast weapons or cutting an oni down by targeting weak points. Part of the charm of *Wireless Soul Transmission* is seeing the players overcome challenges like this, but the heroes need space to do so. If you ambush your party with a platoon of Chevaliers, it is unlikely that they'll survive long enough to even come up with a clever plan, let alone pull it off.

Lethality
If this thing gets a shot off, how likely is it to connect? What will happen if it does? The painless berserker can be surprisingly resilient, but going solo, it would struggle to take down even a first level ginbushi. On the other hand, an Apollo missile from a Peacemaker could wipe out an entire party in a single shot.

Again, you shouldn't dismiss high-lethality opponents out of hand. The key thing is that the players must have either a rapid escape route or the opportunity to set up a decisive first strike, preferably both. Even without either, an interesting fight can unfold – your players desperately trying to unlock a maintenance tunnel access and hold off berserkers while a Peacemaker tears the building down around them.

The key to this example is that the Peacemaker only uses its heaviest armaments on the building. Foot soldiers, even heroic ones, are considered soft targets. Heavy ordinance might be used to *get at* them, but it probably wouldn't be used *on* them. Indeed the Peacemaker might depart all together once it's blasted a big enough hole for the berserkers to swarm in. Even for the Whisper air support is a limited and valuable commodity.

TALENTED OPPONENTS

Many opponents possess talents and most talents have nothing to prevent chain usage. A banshee could theoretically use its scream every round.

While this is intended to give the GMs full flexibility in how they employ their opponents, rule zero for game masters must be kept firmly in mind. Remember always that your objective is to create exciting and engaging combat, not to destroy the players. If one particular ability perfectly exploits the groups weaknesses then think very carefully before using it every round.

Some tips on alternative ways to use talents:

One of Everything
Use an opponent's abilities in any order throughout the battle, but set yourself the restriction that no ability will be used a second time until every talent (including weapon attacks) has been used at least once.

This is great for opponents with lots of interesting talents as it showcases their full capabilities. You can even use this across several instances of the same foe – suppose the first Oni dies in one round but a second one is not far off.

Big Opening
Pick a single powerful talent and use it at the opening of the battle. Don't use any of the other talents (or at least nothing really potent) for the remainder of the encounter. This contrast will reinforce the power of the initial ability. It's also a good approach for bosses with one really interesting ability that you want to demonstrate before they're torn apart by wrathful heroes.

Escalation
Start with the talent you feel will be least effective against the players and work your way up across the encounter. You can repeat the use of talents, but you can never deescalate.

This is good for establishing a sense of time pressure, since the players don't know how much stronger their opponent can get they'll be looking to take them down

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as fast as possible. Note that this only really works for opponents with a lot of survivability. Most opponents don't have that benefit, but a large group of like foes, or an opponent that a player will face in single combat could have this luxury.

Repeating as Tactical Challenge

A single opponent uses a particular talent exclusively and at every opportunity. This ability shouldn't necessarily be devastating, but it should demonstrate to the players that the battle will be a lot harder if this opponent isn't dealt with first. A suzerain might constantly resurrect the berserkers the players are trying to deal with, or a collector standing in searing fire might keep harpooning players back into the flames.

To prevent this from being irritating you need to make sure the players have an early and ongoing opportunity to deal with this opponent. This is a great opportunity to let the party sniper shine by giving them a critical target that's out of reach of the rest of the heroes.

Note that this approach should never be used if it exclusively targets one player, or if the talent in question is so effective it completely cripples the parties ability to act until the one foe is dealt with.

Defensive Talents

The above tips are generally for aggressive talents. Defensive talents, like heijoshin, should be applied consistently. The danger of having a defense that 'switches on an off' is that it can be unclear *why* this is happening. In the absence of an in-universe explanation it will look like the opponent is setup to allow certain players to deal more harm to it than others.

ALIEN SPECIES TEMPLATES

With the exception of the banshee, none of the stat blocks we've provided below specify a species. This is not accidental, you can present any template to the players as any species you feel necessary, though an Averyn settlement headman will make more sense than a Hulgari ronin. Sometimes it's even appropriate to suggest that a group of berserkers is comprised of several species. In practical terms, which ones are which species is not significant, these individuals are now more lost berserker than anything else.

Should you choose, you can provide some special abilities to your alien species. Below are the racial talents we used on characters in the story blocks, grouped for your convenience. We recommend you use these sparingly, the players are humans and should not feel that every *other* species in the galaxy has some amazing ability. The Calino/Paligar for example, are relatively unremarkable humanoids and have no special talents.

The below is far from an exhaustive list of the sapient species in the Verdant Crest, or even on Hansei. We encourage you to introduce your players to whatever weird and wonderful creatures feel appropriate to you.

Averyn

The Averyn are highly evolved humanoids, in the top quartile of ability for every measurable physical and mental aptitude.

People have trouble objectively describing an Averyn, even races that tower over the Averyn will refer to them as 'tall' and 'powerful'. Some claim they glow or that they can see the light of multitudinous stars deep in their eyes.

Such empirical observations as have been taken find the Averyn to be humanoid digitigrades between 1.8 and 2.3 metres tall. They have claws but no fur (not a common morphological combination), though they do have prominent manes.

Averyn will to live
Incidental, once per round
Averyn remain fully active even while making death saves. They will literally fight until they die. Additional wounds force an additional death save. Averyn receive a fixed +20 vs the death [30] save.

Brandonian

Brandonians are one of the largest sapient races in the galaxy. Heavy set aliens covered in downy fur, they possess a muscular, humanoid torso atop a quadrupedal lower half. Their forelegs are significantly longer than their hind legs, and a large flat tail further helps rebalance their weight across both sets of legs.

Large Creature
Large creatures treat all wounds dealt to them as one category lower, unless the weapon has the LAV or Blast properties.

Incredible Strength
When making *force* checks, Brandonians use a +10 modifier.

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Hulgari

Hulgari are colourful thin-limbed humanoids. Their most distinguishing feature is their telescoping arms. While complex bone and muscle structure allow an extension of reach useful for climbing, these structures are significantly less durable than their human equivalents.

Natural Climbers
Climbing is as natural as walking for Hulgari. They may climb any non-sheer surface without requiring a check. Further, they gain +1d6 advantage on all rolls to jump from perch to perch while climbing.

Xuurthian

Morphologically, Xuurthians have six legs and two arms. Their 'legs' each end in a hooked appendage which is effective for climbing, but not for walking on land (much like a bats). Their arms end in relatively conventional hands with three fingers, a thumb, and a vestigial hook, much smaller than those on their legs.

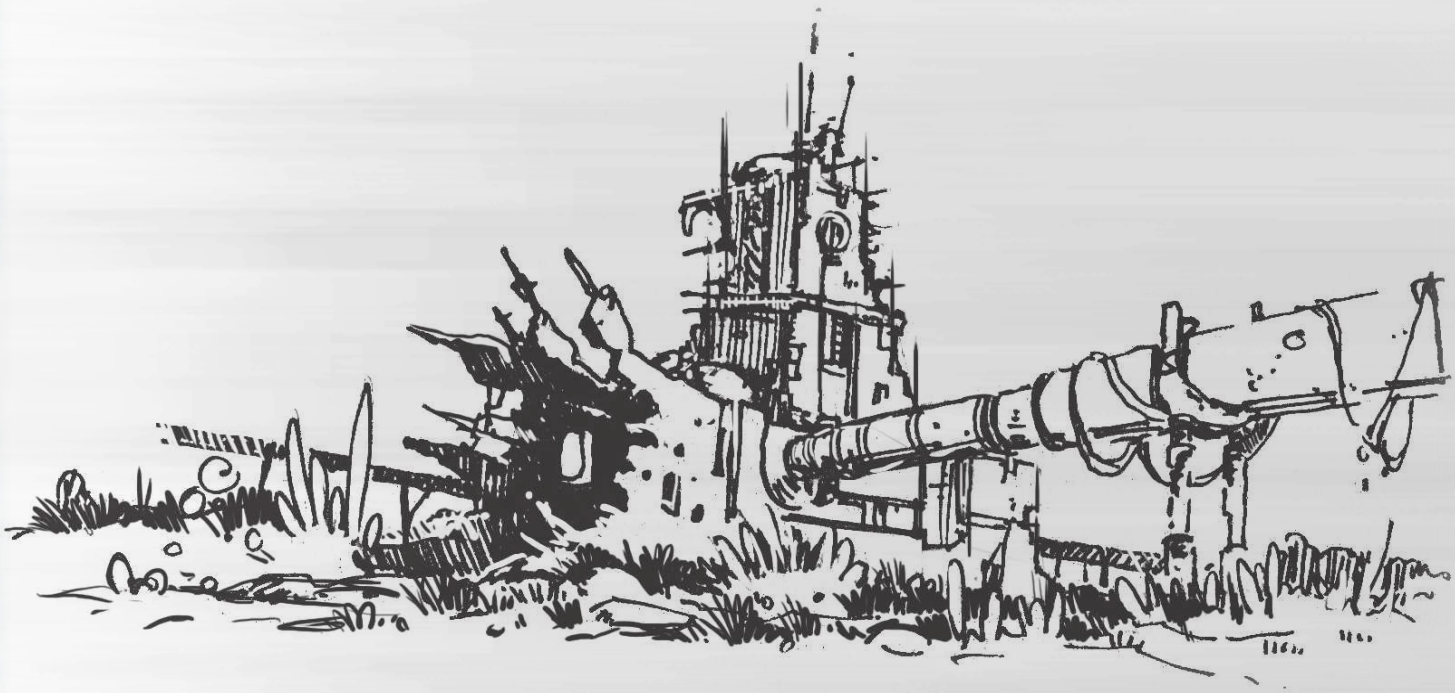
Xuurthian's have a carapace that gives them a armour equivalent to fibreweave on all primary locations. It provides no significant benefit to weakpoints.

Hanging Climbers
Xuurthians can climb any non-sheer wall at full speed without requiring a check. This talent applies also to ceilings where any suitable claw holds exist, such as pipes, chains, branches, etc. If forced to the ground, Xuurthians struggle, as they are unable to effectively balance upright on their hooks. Instead they flatten themselves out and worm crawl along the ground. While moving in this fashion, they cannot perform long dashes and may not benefit from their *evade* defence.

Natural Weapon Attacks

Leg Hook slash			
AP: Fibreweave		Range: Melee	
Grazed [1]	Lacerated [2–4]	Crippled [5–6]	Cleaved
On a successful attack the Xuurthian can pull a creature off the ground. Victims only get an opposed force check if they can immediately grab some fixture.			

Blade tumble
If a Xuurthian begins a round with a target grabbed and held off the ground, they may spend a complex action to make four leg hook slash attacks against that target.



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THE WHISPER AND ITS AGENTS

The Whisper is the most pervasive and dangerous adversary the Empire has ever encountered. Rightly, its agents will be among the most common the players fight.

The Whisper is omnipresent, but its ability to multitask is not infinite. For the most part, its minions operate in groups, following broad and simple instructions from the Whisper.

After years of fighting them, the survivors have come to broadly define the Whispered according to three categories.

The Ruined

The ruined is a collective term for all those who were once human and now serve the Whisper. This includes berserkers, ronin, suzerains and, from a crusader perspective, the lost.

Without exception, the ruined once had names, jobs, families, friends, and aspirations. Every survivor knows people among the ruined, and most ruined are connected in some way to a survivor. This makes them a contentious issue, they are dangerous, and occasionally, they must be dealt with, but they are also us.

Besides crusaders, the survivor factions will rarely take steps to proactively remove the ruined. In general, they prefer to operate around them, trying to avoid direct combat and the casualties it inflicts.

The Raised

The raised are far less contentious. Collectors, banshees and oni, these are creatures that appeared not long after the Shatter – designed by the Whisper's own tainted consciousness. From a survivor's perspective, they are out-and-out monsters, and no remorse accompanies their destruction.

Of course, most raised are proportionally more powerful – more viscerally terrifying – than the ruined. Survivors may avoid the ruined because they don't want to kill a fellow human, but they avoid the raised because they're afraid.

The Reclaimed

The reclaimed are machines, vehicles, and systems that were once weapons of our own civilisation and have been turned against us by the Whisper. Though in some respects these are the most familiar, they can also be the most dangerous. Many of these devices were fine-tuned for killing our own kind, and they are exceedingly efficient at it.

AUTONOMOUS VEHICLES AND MULTIPLE CONTROL CORES

A number of the vehicles in this section are autonomous. These vehicles rely on 'control cores' which manage their internal functions. Each control core can be considered as an interchangeable crew member who may act as a gunner or pilot.

This means that an autonomous vehicle with three weapons and three control cores may make attacks with all three weapons.

While you're welcome to apply whatever skill levels you feel appropriate to Whisper control cores, we normally give them a +6 bonus to attack skills and a +4 to *cover* and *evade*.

LOST

The lost are not so much agents of the Whisper, as they are its victims. Six years ago, their minds were broken by the Shatter, and now they are tangible ghosts, endlessly replaying some act from their previous lives.

Their bodies are gaunt, their fat stores and digestive systems have been largely left to decay or replaced by strange new synthetic organs. Their nervous structure has been replaced with ribbons of black conductive alloy. It's speculated that this new structure somehow feeds them energy from the wireless because no one has ever seen a lost eat. They do drink, however; and those deprived of water dry out and eventually die.

How, or even when, the Whisper modified them this way is unknown, but any medical expert can see signs that the black alloys were constructed by nanites. What no one can explain is why the Whisper bothers keeping these poor unfortunates alive at all.

Lost are deaf to instruction and incapable of speech, but they are generally compliant if led. Given the first opportunity, they will return to their previous activity.

Some lost may prove aggressive, if their previous existence seems to require it. Lost security guards, for example, have been known to gun down scavengers who trespass on their protected ground.

If you need a template for a lost, use whichever berserker entry seems most appropriate.

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BERSERKERS – SCAMP

Movement: 4 Dash, 8 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +1, Unskilled +0

Skilled N/A – Whatever skills the lost had in their previous lives, they no longer possess.

DEFENCES

Cover 15	Evade 10	Base 5
	IC8	

Armour: None, scamps wear the decaying clothes of their previous life.

Wounds Tolerance: Minion

Description

Berserker is the survivor's name for a lost turned violent. By definition, all berserkers possessed a DNI, but not all were heavily augmented. 'Scamp' is the survivor name for those berserkers that are 'mostly human'.

Scamps charge their targets on mass without attempting to use cover. They will long dash towards the closest opponent and then attack in melee.

A scamp will be carrying only what it held at the time of the Shatter. Most have no augmentation, though some might have worker's hands or an Eternity memory extension.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +0	*Aim* +0	*Recoil* +0	*Melee* +3

TALENTS

Peel the Armour

Simple action

When faced with an armoured target, scamps will attempt to restrain it and then find the releases for its armour. The scamps must first succeed at an opposed *force* check (they do get their pack tactics bonus, see unarmed below).

Once a target is restrained, a scamp may remove its helmet on the following round.

On the round after the helmet is removed, scamps not currently restraining the target, may make their normal attacks versus the unarmoured head without rolling hit location.

As a complex action, a character may attempt to shake free with another opposed *force* check. They may recover and wear their helmet as a simple action.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Unarmed

AP: Padding — Range: Melee

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1–4]	[5]	[6]	

Pack tactics: Scamps work very well together. When two attack the same target, in the same round, the second gets 1d6 advantage. If a third joins it receives a 2d6 advantage and so on.

BERSERKERS – GUNNER

Movement: 4 Dash, 8 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +1, Unskilled +0

Skilled N/A – Whatever skills the lost had in their previous lives, they no longer possess.

DEFENCES

Cover 15	Evade 10	Base 5
	IC8	

Armour: Fibreweave vests

Wounds Tolerance: Minion

Description

Berserker is the survivor's name for a lost turned violent. Many of those who turned were former security guards – fallen house troops and private muscle for corporations too small to have ginbushi.

Gunners generally don't intentionally use cover. They will make snapshots while moving to a position with a good view of the closest target and then use *aimed* shots to finish them off.

Guards will often have keys/security passes that may or may not be relevant to their present location. Some few will have Armsmaster fire control smart weapons and/or Aegis vision systems.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +2	*Aim* +2	*Recoil* +2	*Melee* +3

WEAPON ATTACKS

Auto Pistol

AP: Fibreweave — Range: Medium

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Shot Through
[1]	[2–4]	[5]	[6]

Gunners don't use special ranged attacks like autofire, etc.

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BERSERKERS – HPDF GUNNER

Movement: 5 Dash, 10 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +2, Unskilled +0

Skilled N/A – Whatever skills the lost had in their previous lives, they no longer possess.

DEFENCES

Cover 17	Evade 11	Base 5
	IC 8	

Armour: Combat armour – Padded armour with ceramic torso and head protection

Wounds Tolerance: Minion

Description

Berserker is the survivor's name for a lost turned violent. Once humanities last line of defence, the Hansei Planetary Defence Force were hard hit by the Whisper and they number prominently among the lost and berserkers. HPDF gunners colloquially referred to as 'PDs', 'Peteys' or just 'Petes'.

Gunners generally don't intentionally use cover. They will make *snapshots* while moving to a position with a good view of the closest target and then use *aimed* shots to finish them off.

As former HPDF, many will have Armsmaster fire control smart weapons and/or Aegis vision systems. The vast majority will carry pulse rifles though some may carry heavy weapons.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +4	*Aim* +4	*Recoil* +4	*Melee* +3

WEAPON ATTACKS

Pulse Rifle

AP: Ceramic — Range: Long

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Shot Through
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Gunners don't use special ranged attacks like autofire, etc.

Pulse Gun

AP: Steel — Range: Medium

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverized
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Setup (full round), autofire only, two-handed, LAV, first 2 autofire attacks always trigger additional autofire attacks.

Artemis Launcher

AP: Steel — Range: Long

Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Setup (simple), Blast 15, scatters, two-handed, AA

BERSERKERS – PAINLESS

Movement: 4 Dash, 8 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +1, Unskilled +0

Skilled (+10) in *force*

DEFENCES

Cover 15	Evade 10	Base 5
	IC 8	

Armour: None, painless wear the decaying clothes of their previous life.

Wounds Tolerance: 0 (Painless)

Painless: Painless don't have a wounds tolerance, but they do not feel pain, will not bleed out, and cannot go into shock. They can only be killed through a critical or maiming wound to one of the following locations: head, eyes, heart, lungs, sternum, armpit, or kidneys

Significant injury to other location should still impact their ability to fight. Easy to slow, difficult to stop.

Description

Berserker is the survivor's name for a lost turned violent. Because berserkers have lost their higher brain functions, those with augmentations that enhance intelligence or perception are not noticeably more dangerous than those without.

Then there's the painless.

Whether for combat, construction, or personal desire, these individuals once augmented their strength and resilience. They are difficult to kill and dangerously strong up close.

Painless charge the nearest target without care for their own survival and will attempt to smash it until it's destroyed. They are not above slamming through walls or throwing heavy objects.

A painless will be carrying only what it held at the time of the Shatter. Most have two Hercules arm augmentations.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +0	*Aim* +0	*Recoil* +0	*Melee* +3

WEAPON ATTACKS

UNARMED

AP: Ceramic — Range: Melee

Crippled	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverized
[1]	[2]	[3–4]	[5–6]

Knockback: Getting slammed by a Painless should knock a character back several squares. Allow a *react* [15] check to avoid falling prone.

Misses should smash furniture and crack walls, etc.

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COLLECTOR

Movement: 5 Dash, 10 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +5, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+6) in *athletics*, *force* and *spot/listen*

DEFENCES

Cover 15	Evade 10	Base 2
	IC 10	

Armour: Steel (Fibreweave weak points)

Wounds Tolerance: N/A (Self repair)
Collectors repair all damage they've suffered at the beginning of each round. To defeat one, you must destroy it completely, requiring a blast weapon with an AP of at least steel.

Description

The collector is among the most feared of the Whisper's machines. Eight-feet-tall constructs of black metal and monstrous visage, they prowl the city, hunting the augmented. They locate their prey using a wireless call that demands answer from augments. When they find a victim, they pin them down and saw off the augmented limb, often with fatal consequences.

When a collector is damaged, which is rare, it oozes a black fluid of nanites. In a matter of moments, the nanites register the damage and repair the area.

Collectors are normally carrying a variety of augments they have claimed from their previous victims. These are woven bird's nest-like into the spines on the Collector's back.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +8	*Aim* +8	*Recoil* +0	*Melee* +8

TALENTS

Collectors Call

Incidental

The collector emits a shrill cry over the wireless that compels augments within extreme range to call back. Make a +6 wireless attack roll versus the IC defence of every character with augments. On a success, it knows the approximate location of the character with the augments.

If successful within short range, it determines the exact location, even if the character is hidden.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Harpoons (x2)

AP: Ceramic — Range: Medium

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Run Through
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Harpoons are fired as a pair, each with its own attack and damage roll. Any target that is at least punctured is caught by the harpoon. On the following round, the collector may reel the target in as an incidental action, moving them to an adjacent square. A character may attempt to hold their ground with an opposed *force* check.

A player can rip out a harpoon with a *force* [15] check, but barbs cause an immediate *lacerated* wound to the same hit location. The harpoon cable can be cut as a simple action by any slashing weapon with an AP of ceramic.

Grappling Claw

AP: Fibreweave — Range: Melee

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

On a successful attack, the target is pinned in the claw. Generally, targets are held against the floor or a wall.

Targets must beat the collector in an opposed *force* check to escape and when using the grappling arm, the collector gets a +10 modifier instead of its normal +6

Circular Saw

AP: Fibreweave — Range: Melee

Grazed	Lacerated	Crippled	Cleaved
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

On a pinned target, the collector does not roll hit location (it always targets the joining point for an augmentation. If the augment is in the skull or torso, it picks the most appropriate hit location to burrow its way in).

So long as the target remains pinned, each round the collector may attack the same character and hit location as an incidental action with no roll every round. Each round the collector may increase either the AP or the damage by one category until it achieves a cleaved result.

At that point, it collects the augment.

A COLLECTOR IS MURDERING MY WHOLE PARTY!
Collectors are an excellent, horror-movie-style monster to ratchet up the tension for early game players. Their method of surgery is destructive, but it offers plenty of opportunity to engineer an escape. Whatever happens, players will learn quickly what all of the other survivors already know: you can't fight a collector.

But what happens if they (or you) have seriously misjudged and have no reasonable escape route?

This is where the inherently alien nature of the Whisper is to your advantage. Collectors will frequently claim a single augment and then move on, even if they're surrounded by other augmented characters. Remember, their objective isn't to kill the party, it's to collect.

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SUZERAIN

Movement: 5 Dash, 10 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +3, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+6) in *resist, computer use*, and 2 other skills of GM's choice

DEFENCES

Cover 17	Evade 12	Base 5
	IC 16	

Armour: None, suzerains wear the decaying clothes of their previous life.

Wounds Tolerance: 2 (see 'In the Augmentation' talent below)

Description

The Whisper is omnipresent, but its attention can only be divided so many ways. To remain responsive, it uses suzerains as lieutenants, programming them with specific orders and then focusing its attention elsewhere.

Unlike the lost, a suzerain retains much of its former personality, but that personality has been damaged when the Whisper's programming was stamped upon it. Thus suzerains will always serve the objective given by the Whisper, but the echoes of their former selves will be very apparent in how they go about it.

Suzerains are most often chosen from commanding individuals who lived or worked in the location they will be operating. From an apartment block, it might choose a superintendent; from a national park, it might select a park ranger.

Though they may carry any weapons and equipment you feel appropriate, most suzerains attack wirelessly. This template below is intended to give you versatility in creating a suzerain appropriate to its location.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +3	*Aim* +3	*Recoil* +3	*Melee* +3

TALENTS

In the Augmentation

All suzerain's have at least one augment from their previous life. This augmentation has been twisted by the Whisper and, in place of its normal function, now serves as a conduit to the Whisper. The tell-tale susurrations of the whisper can be heard coming from within if one is foolish enough to listen.

Even after the suzerain has taken enough hits to kill it, the augmentation will still attempt to make wireless attacks and, where practicable, will drag the corpse around to keep players in line of sight.

The suzerain can only be completely killed by disabling the infected augmentation with a critical or maiming injury to the augmented location. Any enduring talents a suzerain inflicts end immediately when the players disable the augment.

If a suzerain is killed but the body (in particular the augmentation) is not completely destroyed, it will use nanites to repair its itself and its host. The augmentation can repair itself within a week and can restore all of its hosts lost wounds within 24 hours. Most augmentations can be destroyed in a sufficiently hot fire, an industrial press or by a blast weapon.

Decompile

Simple Action, +9 attack vs IC

The suzerain can launch an attack directly against an active program. Simple programs (walls, decoys, etc.) are destroyed automatically. More complex programs (like banshees) have a wounds tolerance and will instead suffer a point of mental trauma.

If the target has an IC defence, the suzerain must make a successful attack roll against it.

When creating your suzerain give them three of the following attacks to use

Where possible, tailor them to the character of your suzerain and the location they're found in.

Back to Work!

Simple action, +2 attack vs IC

The target starts performing a rudimentary job in the local area (much as a lost would). It may perform no other actions than moving to an nearby workstation and performing a repetitive task as appropriate to the location (data entry, assembly line quality control, etc.).

At the end of their turn, each round the victim may make a *resist* [12] check to recover.

No Back Talk!

Off-turn action, +9 attack vs IC

This attack is performed as an interrupt the first time each round that someone attacks the suzerain. The target is frozen just before they complete the attack, unable to pull the trigger/make their *melee* strike connect. The attack is wasted, and the player's turn ends.

And They Trusted You...

Off-turn action, +0 Attack vs IC

After a successful *No Back Talk!* defence, immediately roll an attack with this talent. On success, the suzerain redirects the attack it just prevented against the target of its choice. Characters can't be forced to shoot themselves, but they can shoot their allies.

That's Quite Enough of That

Simple action, +5 attack vs IC

The target cannot move or perform any actions next round.

Usage note: Try not to chain this attack against the one low-IC target, no one wants to spend a whole encounter paralysed.

Uneducated Peasant!

Simple action, +5 attack vs IC

The target forgets everything it learned, their motor skills become blunt and unresponsive, and the whole world seems unfamiliar.

All skill checks and attacks are made with no modifier, regardless of the target's ranks.

At the end of their turn each round, the character may make a *resist* [15] check to recover.

continue over

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That was Pitiful!

Simple action

The suzerain can select any agent of the Whisper within medium range and have it take an immediate full turn.

No Slackers!

Simple action

A defeated berserker gets back up and re-joins the fight. It retains all previous injuries and associated penalties, e.g., if it was blinded, it remains blind.

Figment

Simple action, +5 vs IC

While most figments are created by the Whisper, many suzerains also have the capacity to make illusory changes to their surroundings. Generally, this will be on a smaller scale than those engineered by the ambient Whisper. Common tricks include making doorways appear blocked, creating decoy opponents, and creating noises that suggest large scale reinforcements are arriving in the next couple of rounds.

Scorpion Round

Simple action, +5 vs IC

The target believes that, somehow, their weapon's current magazine/power cell has a deadly scorpion on it. They know for certain that if they fire, they will be stung.

On their following turn, the player must either drop the weapon or make a *resist* [10] check to calmly reload the weapon. On success, they discard two munitions tokens.

On failure, they believe they are stung and drop the weapon. For the next five rounds, they must make an *endurance* [15] check each round or suffer a point of mental trauma as they believe the poison is coursing through their body.

Looking for something?

Off-turn action

Choose a power from the suzerain's wireless attacks to be the suzerains retaliation power. Each suzerain only has the one retaliation power and it does not change and cannot be used except by this ability.

If a character attempts a wireless attack against one of the suzerain's allies, they must instead win an opposed computer use check against the suzerain for their power to be successful.

If they fail, their wireless attack fails and they are afflicted by the suzerain's retaliation power instead.

Puppeteer

Simple action, +5 vs IC

The target is now controlled completely by the suzerain and must carry out its instructions to the best of their ability.

At the end of their turn each round, a character may make a *resist* [15] check to regain control of themselves.

Usage Note: Don't overuse domination on heroes. Not only is it powerful, but it can be divisive when players decide it's most expedient to gun down the Whisper-puppet character.

This is best used once in an encounter, generally as an opener.

Weaker and Stronger Suzerains

Suzerains serve the important role of making the Whisper a little less faceless. For this reason, it's good to use them throughout your campaign.

You can easily make your suzerains stronger, or weaker, based on the talents you choose for them. At higher levels (9 and above) you may also wish to allow your suzerain to make multiple wireless attacks in a round, or to give them a weapon and let them make one physical, and one wireless attack each round.

William Kwan (Quiet) 36187234

RONIN – ASPIRANT

Movement: 6 Dash, 12 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +3, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+6) in *resist, react, acrobatics*

DEFENCES

Cover 18	Evade 15	Base 5
	IC 13	

Armour: Kimono with a fibreweave vest

Wounds Tolerance: 3

Description

The zaibatsu maintain the story that no samurai has ever fallen to the Whispers control. Unfortunately, this is not true, and fallen ginbushi are among the most dangerous of the Whisper's minions. Among the ginbushi, these entities are referred to as ronin.

Ronin of any kind are not common, and fallen aspirants make up a little over half their number – their unproven discipline making them easier targets. The distinction between an aspirant ronin and a true ronin is lost on most survivors, who rightly fear both.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +3	*Aim* +3	*Recoil* +3	*Melee* +3

Feats of Skill: 2

TALENTS

Of the Spider Clan

Incidental

Anytime a ronin suffers a serious wound or greater, a pool of sickly black ichor splatters to the floor. This nanite-rich blood quickly reorganises itself into a teaming mass of tiny spiders. These spiders can only be destroyed by blast weapons, though they will fall inert when the ronin dies.

The spiders move 1 square per round, but if they start in a square with another character they will make a +7 attack versus *evade* to swarm up their legs.

On the following round, the spiders will burrow beneath any armour and force themselves into the victim's bloodstream, inflicting Whisper venom sickness (progression at the end of the true ronin template).

Heijoshin I

Off-turn action

A ronin aspirant may evade the first successful attack against it each round. If caught in a blast they may draw from the same pool to turn a failed *react* check into a success and move further from the blast.

If attacked in melee by a character who possesses *heijoshin I* or greater, this talent may not be used.

Rei

Off-turn action

When a character attacks and misses a ronin, the ronin may spend a feat of skill to make an immediate *melee* or *snapshot* attack versus the aggressor.

This can be used even if the attack was forced to miss by *heijoshin*.

Gi

Incidental

When making a *melee* attack, the ronin may spend a feat of skill to use the Weak-Point Hit Location Table.

Weapon Attacks

Steel Katana

AP: Fibreweave — Range: Melee

Grazed	Lacerated	Crippled	Cleaved
[1]	[2]	[3–4]	[5–6]

When wielded with two hands, the AP can be upgraded to ceramic.

Bamboo Yumi

AP: Fibreweave — Range: Long

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Shot through
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

silent, no-volley

When fired at short range, the yumi treats its AP as ceramic, but it does not benefit from point-blank range attacks. A bow cannot be used for volley fire attacks.

DUELING FOR HONOUR

By intention, *heijoshin* does not work against other characters with equivalent or better *heijoshin*. This creates a strong impetus for the party's ginbushi to face opponents like ronin solo, while the rest of the party deal with other foes.

You should do what you can to keep these duels memorable, but equally, you shouldn't force them. If the party wants to bring down a ronin with overwhelming fire, they're welcome to do so.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

BANSHEE

Movement: 6 Hover

Skills: Basic +3, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+8) in *resist, computer use*

DEFENCES

IC 18

Wounds Tolerance: 2 (program)
As a program, a banshee has no equipment, weapons, or augmentation and cannot be harmed by corporeal attacks.

Each time she is struck by attacks that would destroy a program, she suffers one point against her wounds tolerance. As soon as she suffers more wounds than she has tolerance, she dies.

Description

Banshees use wireless attacks like suzerains, but they have no tangible presence. Their agonised screams across the wireless wreak madness on the augmented, and they are regarded with every bit the fear of their namesake.

Curiously, all banshees have the same appearance: a young female Averyn dressed in clothes that may have been once fine but are now fouled with blood. This apparition floats just a little above the ground, her feet dragging across the rubble beneath her. She has a gory wound at her throat, her eyes are glassy and don't focus, her hands hang limply by her sides.

Banshees are vengeful and will always attack the last person who attacked them, doubly so if that person was able to inflict actual harm. If the banshee has not yet been attacked it will target the closest foe.

TALENTS

Spectre of Death

Off-turn action, +4 vs IC

Anytime a character tries to attack the banshee (wirelessly or otherwise) this talent triggers. If it's successful, the target sees a vision of their own death and, instead of completing their attack, must use a *dash* to move to the nearest cover and cower there until the beginning of their next turn.

Decompile

Simple Action, +9 attack vs IC

The banshee launches an attack directly versus an active program. Simple programs (walls, decoys etc.) are destroyed automatically. More complex programs (like banshees) have a wounds tolerance and will instead suffer a point of mental trauma.

Spear Eternal

Complex Action, +8 attack vs IC

The banshee creates a spear above her and stabs it into the throat of an adjacent opponent. They suffer a point of mental trauma as they see their blood drain out of the wound and start filling a crystal globe in the banshee's hand.

At the start of their turn, the victim must make a successful *resist* check versus the banshee's +8 *computer use*. On failure, they're frozen in place, unable to act.

Scream

Simple action, +6 attack vs IC

The banshee releases a scream of pain and fear across the wireless that unravels even the strongest minds. Make a wireless attack roll versus every DNI equipped character in medium range, ignoring obstructions. For each character that this talent successfully hits, roll a d4 and inflict the corresponding effect from the below:

1. Stunned: The character can't move or take actions. A *resist* [effort 15] check is required to overcome.

2. Rending: Suffer a point of mental trauma.

3. I have to get my implant out: The character can't stand the scream and is trying to silence it by removing one of their Implants. They must remove one implant (their choice) by the most expeditious means available. A *resist* [effort 20] check is required to overcome.

4. The Whisper takes you: The character falls under control of the Whisper and the banshee will dictate its actions until it is freed or killed. A *resist* [effort 55] check is required to overcome.

—

At the end of their turn, each round, a character suffering from effect 1, 3, or 4 may roll towards a *resist* efforting check. As soon as they reach the listed score they have shaken off the effects.

WHY WOULD A PROGRAM HAVE A VISIBLE FORM?
Banshees and Aspects frequently announce their presence by creating augmented reality projections in the wireless. In some cases they will even use local holographic projectors or screens to present themselves to the disconnected.

It's important to realise that these entities were not always programs, and a sense of self remains important to them. They *could* simply be invisible code, but they *choose* not to.

William Kwan (Quiet 36187234)

PEACEMAKER DRONE

The Peacemaker Drone is a vehicle and uses vehicle rules for movement and damage.

Movement type: Flight/VTOL/Bipedal
Speed Rating: 4 (atmosphere), 6 (space)
Skills: Basic +5, Unskilled +3
Skilled (+6) in *force, spot/listen, stealth, pilot*

DEFENCES

Cover 10	Evade 5	Base 2
	IC 15	

Mechanical Tolerance: 3
Primary Armour: Advanced Composites
Damage Threshold: Blast
Annihilation Threshold: Large Blast

Crew positions: 3 Networked ANI control cores

Access points: None

Weakness – Primary Lift Latticework

Difficulty / skill: *Engineering* or *Warcraft* [15]

Vulnerable to: All blast weapons with an AP capable of defeating the primary armour.

Impact: The vehicle is forced to gradually descend (one range band per round) until it reaches a height no greater than 30cm (12") off the ground.

Weakness – Solar Collectors

Difficulty / skill: *Engineering* or *Warcraft* [15]

Vulnerable to: All blast weapons with an AP of Steel or better. Only while deployed.

Impact: If a solar panel is shattered the drone loses its ability to loiter infinitely and must return to its charging site every 24 hours. There are two sets of solar panels, if both are hit the drone must return every 6 hours.

Weakness – Control Cores

Difficulty / skill: Not directly targetable
Vulnerable to: Any weapon that could normally harm the vehicle
Impact: Any hit location against the head or eyes, instead destroys one of the control cores.
If one control core goes down, one of the others can take its place, as a normal crew member would, but it must surrender its own work.
This weakness can be exploited three times, once for each control core.

Description

Peacemaker drones are autonomous weapons platforms designed to have almost infinite loiter capacity. Operationally, a squadron of Peacemakers would be deployed over a theatre and could then be used to destroy any emergent target of opportunity and provide on-demand fire support for friendly ground forces.

The Peacemaker is designed not just for longevity but also for intimidation. Its fuselage evokes a two-storey tall predatory bird. Most noticeable are the broad wings that collapse and expand from the machine's back. While loitering, these wings provide a large surface of high-gain solar collectors and help keep the craft aloft; during combat they can be stowed for protection.

Adding to the avian imagery are its reverse canted legs with metal talons that it can use to latch onto buildings or capture high-value targets. Under the Whisper's control, these talons have been sharpened, a clear indication that capturing targets alive is no longer a priority. The machine's sensor package is built into a stylised hawk's head, but unlike the talons, the beak is purely decorative.

When landed, the machine's weapons pods unlimber onto independently targetable arms (each has its own control core). Each arm carries a pulse gun and a rocket pod. While in flight, these weapons are locked forwards, but it can then bring its four Apollo missiles to bear as well.

Peacemakers are one of the few machines that the Whisper makes a point of maintaining. Almost every city in the Verdant Crest has a service spire where the Peacemakers gather and are restocked by diligent lost using ammunition and parts raided from Imperial and HPDF airbases.

In addition to the Newtonian lattice they use to achieve weightlessness, a Peacemaker generates thrust by two heavy ion turbines. These allow it to operate in space, or in the atmosphere, but it cannot transition between the two by itself.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +8	*Aim* +8	*Recoil* +0	*Melee* +8

TALENTS

Flares

Off-turn action

Once per round, in response to an attack roll against it, this vehicle may deploy flares. These apply 1d6 disadvantage to the attack roll, potentially forcing a miss.

The Peacemaker may only use flares while in flight.

Weapon Attacks

Ram

AP: Steel — Range: Melee

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Considered to have large blast property for vehicle damage.

Talons

AP: Ceramic — Range: Melee

Grazed	Lacerated	Crippled	Cleaved
[1]	[2]	[3–4]	[5–6]

Grab and crush: If a Peacemaker makes a successful attack with its talons, the victim suffers damage and then must make an immediate *react* [15] check or be grabbed. As an incidental action, the Peacemaker may repeat the talon damage on a grabbed character each round.

Damage to the leg, or an opposed *force* check as a simple action, will cause the Peacemaker to release its victim.

continue over

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

Pulse Gun (x2)			
AP: Steel		Range: Medium	
Clipped [1]	Fractured [2–3]	Shattered [4–5]	Pulverised [6]
Autofire only, LAV, first 2 autofire attacks always trigger additional autofire attacks.			

Rocket Pack (x2)			
AP: Advanced Composite		Range: Long	
Singed [1]	Burned [2–4]	Charred [5]	Immolated [6]
Four shots only, blast 15, ripple-fire 4 Ripple fire – This weapon has four shots. Recoil attacks may fire anywhere between one round and all remaining ammo. Blast templates from multiple shots must either overlap or share a common edge, and each receives its own attack roll.			

Apollo Missile Launcher			
AP: Advanced Composite		Range: Extreme	
Singed [1]	Burned [2]	Charred [3–4]	Immolated [5–6]
Four shots only, Large blast 15, AA, ripple fire 4 Ripple fire – This weapon has four shots. Recoil attacks may fire anywhere between one round and all remaining ammo. Blast templates from multiple shots must either overlap or share a common edge, and each receives its own attack roll.			

PEACEMAKER HIT LOCATIONS

Because of its very humanoid form, we recommend using the normal hit locations chart for the Peacemaker.

Doing so requires some imagination on what the parts might represent (lungs becoming air-intakes for instance) and what impact that might have.

Still, we feel it's worth it. Peacemaker drones should be among the most feared adversaries the players will face, able to bomb them from the air and, if necessary, land and pursue them into tunnels (provided they're large enough). Reinforcing their humanoid visage helps make them seem more a sentient predator and less a machine.

CHEVALIER – AUTONOMOUS BATTLE TANK

The Chevalier is a vehicle and uses vehicle rules for movement and damage.

Movement type: Tracked
Speed Rating: 2
Skills: Basic +4, Unskilled +2
Skilled (+5) in *drive*

DEFENCES

Cover 20 Evade 7 Base 2
IC 15

Mechanical Tolerance: 4
Primary Armour: Advanced Composites
Damage Threshold: Blast
Annihilation Threshold: Large Blast

Crew positions: 3 ANI control cores

Access points: A maintenance hatch at the back to access the control cores and restock consumables. The internal crawlspace is very cramped and unsafe during operation.

Weakness – External Sensors

Difficulty / skill: *Engineering* or *Warcraft* [15]

Vulnerable to: Any weapon that can defeat ceramic armour

Impact: A single successful attack against one of the vehicle's external sensors will blind the vehicle on that facing.
The attack can only blind the facing towards the attacker. This weakness can be exploited seven additional times, once from each facing (front, back, left and right) and one for each of the vehicle's three weapons. This redundant system means it is very difficult to completely blind the vehicle.

Weakness – Weak Rear Armour

Difficulty / skill: *Engineering* or *Warcraft* [15]

Vulnerable to: Any weapon that can pierce steel armour

Impact: Attacks on this vehicle from its rear facing treat the vehicle armour value as steel.

Weakness – Control Cores

Difficulty / skill: Not directly targetable

Vulnerable to: Any weapon that could normally harm the vehicle

Impact: Any hit location that would normally transfer a hit to a crew member, gunner, or driver instead destroys one of the control cores.
If one control core goes down, one of the others can take its place, as a normal crew member would, but it must surrender its own work.

This weakness can be exploited three times, once for each control core.

continue over

William Kwan (Quiet) 36187234

Weakness – Maintenance Hatch

Difficulty / skill: *Engineering* or *Warcraft* [20]

Vulnerable to: *Defeat Security* [effort 50]

Impact: A bold character who is willing to get close enough could unlock the maintenance hatch on the rear of the vehicle. Although climbing in during operation would almost certainly be fatal, even a basic frag grenade thrown into the maintenance hatch will destroy all three control cores.

Description

As air power advanced, the role of the main battle tank was expected to decline, yet somehow the necessity of an armoured beast that could anchor friendly lines or lead a charge, never quite ended.

Human battle tanks were designed to attract a lot of fire, often more than they could withstand, so this made them an ideal candidate for autonomous control. The Chevalier is the result of this line of thinking.

Comprised predominantly of armour around a small space for machinery and the control cores that operate it, the Chevalier is understandably hard to kill. This is reinforced through the separation of control into separate, but networked control cores, one for each weapon and one for driving.

Its main armament is an energy cannon mounted on a relatively traditional tank turret. For protection from infantry it mounts two independently tracking pulse guns.

The large inventory of autonomous battle tanks was responsible, in large part, for the fall of the HPDF during the Shatter. Fortunately, the Whisper has not kept up with the maintenance requirements on these vehicles, and most are now inoperable.

continue over

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +6 *Aim* +6 *Recoil* +6 *Melee* +4

TALENTS

Smoke launchers

Incidental

This vehicle has access to single-use smoke launchers which can be triggered by the driver as an incidental action. The smoke completely covers the vehicle and all immediately adjacent tiles. Any attacks into, out of, or through the smoke suffer 1d6 disadvantage.

The smoke dissipates by the end of the vehicle's next turn.

Watchtower AMS

Off-turn action

This vehicle is equipped with a Watchtower anti-missile system. This high-speed radar is paired with a solid-state laser to shoot down incoming missiles.

The first missile fired against the vehicle from medium range or greater, each round, is shot down. The weapon detonates so that the near edge of its blast radius is two squares away from the vehicle. Weapons with greater than a Large Blast cannot be prevented by Watchtower.

Magnetic Screen

The Chevalier is equipped with a directional magnetic screen. Any attack on the vehicle through the field must use the vehicle's *cover* defence

The field only protects one of the vehicle's four main facings (front, left, right, rear) at any time. As a simple action, any control core may change the facing of the magnetic screen.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Ram

AP: Advanced Composite		Range: Melee	
Clipped [1]	Fractured [2]	Shattered [3–4]	Pulverised [5–6]

Considered to have blast property for vehicle damage

Energy Cannon

AP: Advanced Composite		Range: Extreme	
Singed [1]	Burned [2]	Charred [3–4]	Immolated [5–6]

Blast 20

Pulse Gun (x2)

AP: Steel		Range: Medium	
Clipped [1]	Fractured [2–3]	Shattered [4–5]	Pulverised [6]

Autofire only, LAV, first 2 autofire attacks always trigger additional autofire attacks.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

TRUE RONIN

Movement: 7 Dash, 14 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +5, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+10) in *resist, react, acrobatics*

DEFENCES

Cover 22	Evade 19	Base 5
	IC 15	

Armour: Dō-maru – fibreweave with ceramic torso and head protection

Wounds Tolerance: 5

Description

The zaibatsu maintain the story that no samurai has ever fallen to the Whisper's control. Unfortunately, this is not true, and fallen ginbushi are among the most dangerous of the Whisper's minions. Within the ginbushi clans, these entities, are referred to as ronin.

Ronin operate intelligently in combat, using cover where necessary and targeting opponents they perceive to be the greatest threat first.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +10	*Aim* +0	*Recoil* +5	*Melee* +10

Feats of Skill: 3

TALENTS

Of the Spider Clan

Incidental

Anytime a ronin suffers a serious wound or greater, a pool of sickly black ichor splatters to the floor. This nanite-rich blood quickly reorganises itself into a teaming mass of tiny spiders. These spiders can only be destroyed by blast weapons, though they will fall inert when the ronin dies.

The spiders move 1 square per round, but if they start in a square with another character they will make a +7 attack versus *evade* to swarm up their legs.

On the following round, the spiders will burrow beneath any armour and force themselves into the victim's bloodstream, inflicting Whisper venom sickness (progression at the end of the true ronin template).

Heijoshin III

Off-turn action

A true ronin may evade the first three successful attacks against it per round. If caught in a blast, a ronin may draw from the same pool to turn a failed *react* check into a success and move further from the blast.

If attacked in melee by a character who possesses *heijoshin III* or greater this talent may not be used.

Rei

Off-turn action

When a character attacks and misses a ronin, the ronin may spend a feat of skill to make an immediate *melee* or *snapshot* attack versus the aggressor.

This can be used even if the attack was forced to miss by *heijoshin*.

Meiyo

Incidental

The ronin may spend a feat of skill to gain an additional *melee* attack. This talent may only be used once per round.

Gi

Incidental

When making a *melee* attack, the ronin may spend a feat of skill to use the Weak-Point Hit Location Table.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Nano-forged Katana

AP: Ceramic — Range: Melee

Grazed	Lacerated	Crippled	Cleaved
	[1]	[2–3]	[4–6]

When wielded with two hands, the AP can be upgraded to Steel.

If a character other than the ronin attempts to wield this weapon, the effects are the same as for any other nano-forged katana, see p. 202.

Yumi Flash Bow

AP: Ceramic — Range: Long

Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Concealable, silent, no-volley

When fired at short range, the flash bow treats its AP as Steel, but it does not benefit from point blank range attacks. A bow cannot be used for volley fire attacks.

Whisper Venom

If a victim rolls above their current stage, their condition improves by one. If they roll below it worsens by one. Checks are made when the party rests.

WHISPER VENOM

THRESHOLD	STAGE
20+	Healthy / Cured.
18–19	[Start] Disease is dormant/incubating
15–17	The character suffers 1d6 disadvantage on all IC attacks from the Whisper
5–14	The character automatically fails all checks versus the Whisper
< 5	The subject falls unconscious and goes into a fever. They take death checks, and if they 'die' they come back as a ronin.

William Kwan (Quiet) 36187234

ONI

Movement: 4 Dash, 8 Long Dash.

Skills: Basic +6, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+8) in *athletics, endurance, force*

DEFENCES

Cover 20 | Evade 13 | Base 5

IC 6

Armour: Steel with fibreweave weak-points

Wounds Tolerance: 2 (painless)
Painless: Oni do not feel pain, will not bleed out and cannot go into shock. They can only be killed through a critical or maiming wound to one of the following locations: Head, eyes, heart, lungs, sternum, armpit, or kidneys.

Significant injury to other location should still impact their ability to fight. Easy to slow, difficult to stop.

Description

Oni are tailor-built Whisper shock troops, starting with a berserker and then modifying them with no effort to preserve their original form.

These creatures are humanoid but covered in a black nano-fluid reminiscent of collector blood. Their forearms have been replaced, one with a short-bladed sword of liquid metal and the other with the maw of an energy weapon. Their hulking shoulders are fitted with an Artemis Launcher on one side and a pulse gun on the other.

Oni advance with no regard for their personal well-being. They will deploy their attacks wherever is likely to cause the most damage and chaos.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +7 | *Aim* +7 | *Recoil* +7 | *Melee* +7

TALENTS

Nanotech Regeneration

Incidental

An oni will completely heal one wound each round, provided it is a critical injury or less.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Dual Wielding*: The oni is considered to be wielding all of its weapons simultaneously. If the first attack with any given weapon rolls a natural 10 or higher, the oni may make an attack with another weapon. No weapon may be triggered in this manner more than once per round, though some weapons will get additional attacks by other means (eg autofire)*

Amorphous Metal Wakizashi

AP: Ceramic | Range: Melee

Grazed	Lacerated	Crippled	Cleaved
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Energy Rifle

AP: Steel | Range: Long

Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated
[1]	[2]	[3–5]	[6]

Burst, autofire

Pulse gun

AP: Steel | Range: Long

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Autofire only, two-handed, LAV, first 2 autofire attacks always trigger additional autofire attacks, setup (simple action – counts for pulse gun and Artemis simultaneously)

Artemis Launcher

AP: Steel | Range: Extreme

Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Blast 15, scatters, AA, setup (simple action – counts for pulse gun and Artemis simultaneously)

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

WHISPER AVATAR

Movement: 4 Dash, 8 Long Dash.

Skills: Basic +12, Unskilled +12

Skilled (+12) in all skills

DEFENCES

Cover 26 Evade 22 Base 5

IC 17

Armour: The avatar's surface is constantly in motion; as such, when hit, roll 1d6 and compare to the following list:

1–2 Unarmoured.
3–4 Ceramic carapace
5 Steel
6 Amorphous Metal

Wounds Tolerance: 10

Description

The Whisper aspects never voluntarily bind themselves to a single physical form, but they can be forced to do so by another ascended. This method of quarantining is the secret to destroying an aspect: if the body it's trapped in dies, the aspect dies with it.

The Whisper is too powerful to be quarantined into any normal creature, only ronin or similarly powerful nano-based entities are sufficient. Even then, a single creature is insufficient, and the aspect will generally need to be spread across three or more such creatures.

Since the Whisper is likely to be the final boss of your campaign, we recommend making each avatar as unique and interesting as possible. By the time they face it directly, the Whisper will be familiar with the players, and it should pull out all the stops to get inside their heads. The avatars are modified by nanites, so this time 'figments' are real.

Of course, if your characters have somehow gone the whole campaign without demonstrating any emotional nuance a customised avatar might be impossible. In such a case, we present the Whisper avatar:

The monstrosity before you could only be the avatar of the Ur-aspect, for it is a thing of feather, fur, and chitinous plate. It has five arms and three heads, and its many legs and tails twitch and writhe beneath it as it suspends in the air by means unclear. For all that, it is still not a static thing, new limbs and faces and features appear, blending, consuming and splitting out of the old ones. Entire sections come and go like expressions on the face of a mad man and in the more translucent parts of the skin and armour, you see visages of countless beings long ago consumed by the Whisper.

Though the Whisper is closer to death than it ever has been, it does not fully recognise its predicament (mortality has only ever been an abstract concept for it). More enraged than afraid, it will attempt to slaughter and fools that think they can unmake it, all the while attempting to escape its tethered prison.

Combat Skills

Snap +10 *Aim* +10 *Recoil* +10 *Melee* +10

TALENTS

The Whisper may use one of the following wireless attack actions every round, regardless of its other actions.

Rend

Wireless Attack Action + 12 vs IC

The target suffers a point of mental trauma as the Whisper shreds its mind.

Incapacitating Scream

Wireless Attack Action + 8 vs IC

Roll versus all characters within medium range that are not agents of the Whisper. On success, the character is paralysed by the deafening interference on the wireless until the beginning of the avatar's next turn.

Acid Pool

Wireless Attack Action + 15 vs IC

The Whisper chooses a 3x3 square location and rolls versus anyone who can see that space. All characters it successfully attacks believe the avatar has spat a pool of acid into the location.

Characters who step in it, will believe their foot is immediately charred (actually mental trauma). Characters who fall over in it will be racked with unimaginable pain and will suffer 3d4 points of mental trauma.

Puppeteer

Wireless Attack Action + 8 vs IC

The target is now controlled completely by the Whisper and must carry out its instructions to the best of their ability.

At the end of their turn each round, a character may make a *resist* [15] check to regain control of themselves.

Usage Note: Don't overuse domination on heroes. Not only is it powerful, but it can be divisive when players decide it's most expedient to gun down the Whisper-puppet character.

This is best used once in an encounter, generally as an opener.

Decompile

Incidental, +9 attack vs IC, once per round

The Whisper launches an attack directly against an active program. Simple programs (walls, decoys, etc.) are destroyed automatically. More complex programs (like banshees) have a wounds tolerance and will instead suffer a point of mental trauma.

If the target has an IC defence, the avatar must make a successful attack roll against it.

Note that this talent does not count to the Whisper's wireless attack limit and can be performed every round in *addition* to its other talents.

continue over

William Kwan (Quiet) 36187234

WEAPON ATTACKS

Because of its multiple limbs and complex mental faculties, the Whisper can attack with all of its physical weapons every round without needing a dual-wielding roll.

Nano-forged Katana

AP: Steel — Range: Melee

Grazed	Lacerated	Crippled	Cleaved
	[1]	[2–3]	[4–6]

Due to the Avatar's strength the katana's AP is always steel (as though it were wielded with two hands).

This weapon is a part of the avatar's body and cannot be disarmed.

Arm Laser

AP: Steel — Range: Long

Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated
	[1]	[2–4]	[5–6]

Beam – ignores magnetic screens

Nanite Breath

AP: Steel — Range: Short

Bloodied	Grated	Shredded	Consumed
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

This effect places an autofire template and hits all characters that are at least partially covered. It does not make an attack roll, but characters may make a *react* [15] check to escape as though the autofire template were a Blast

Those that are caught in the area of effect suffer damage to 1d4 hit locations.

Monstrous Tail

AP: Ceramic — Range: Medium

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2]	[3–4]	[5–6]

A successful attack reels in a target being grabbed. Once grabbed, it automatically suffers the same damage each round as the tail crushes it.

A *force* [20] check can be made to escape.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

THE ZAIBATSU AND THEIR EMPLOYEES

Besides the Whisper, the zaibatsu are likely to be the dominant power for much of a campaign. What this means for your players could vary significantly.

Some campaigns may be played using an entirely arcology-based group of heroes, others may find themselves constantly at odds, sometimes violently, with a capricious zaibatsu. Whatever the case, the corporations are very pragmatic about their encounters. They do not hold grudges unnecessarily, but allies are kept only as long as they have value.

Unlike the Whisper, zaibatsu agents are independent and adaptable. Most are well trained in their fields and determined to please their masters.

Zaibatsu agents divide into two broad categories:

Employees

Employees and executives are the rank and file of the corporations. They may be passionate about their corporation's values (or at least passionate about not ending up on the wrong side of the arcology wall), but they are naïve about combat. Most have lived extremely sheltered lives and have only academic knowledge of the world outside.

The Ginbushi

The militant arm of the zaibatsu are another matter entirely. These warriors are more likely to regard the Whisper's agents with contempt than fear. While most employees desire to never fall beneath the Whisper's gaze, the ginbushi only wish their corporate masters would turn them loose.

But unlike the corporations themselves, the ginbushi are fantastically loyal. A ginbushi ally would not lightly turn their back on a friend.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

DOMESTIC EMPLOYEE

Movement: 4 Dash, 8 Long Dash.

Skills: Basic +2, Unskilled +0

Skilled (+2) in *civilised lore, work (domestic)*

DEFENCES

Cover 15 | Evade 10 | Base 5

IC Disconnected

Armour: None, employees wear an appropriate corporate uniform

Wounds Tolerance: Minion

Description

While most corporate employees are experts in their field, all zaibatsu have a range of unspecialised employees. Some of these may act as servants to the executives, human supplements to stressed automatic systems, or assistants to more expert employees.

Regardless of their origin, domestic employees have little interest in combat and will generally flee any sign of violence. They only carry the equipment necessary for their role and would only be armed at utmost desperation.

Domestic employees are always disconnected and so have no augmentations.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +0 | *Aim* +0 | *Recoil* +0 | *Melee* +0

WEAPON ATTACKS

Unarmed

AP: - | Range: Melee

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1–4]	[5]	[6]	

LEAD SCIENTIST

Movement: 4 Dash, 8 Long Dash.

Skills: Basic +1, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+9) in *civilised lore and one of: computer use, medical, engineering* or an appropriate Work skill

DEFENCES

Cover 15 | Evade 10 | Base 5

IC Disconnected

Armour: None, employees wear an appropriate corporate uniform

Wounds Tolerance: 3

Description

Corporate scientists are intended to act as significant characters, whether villain or ally. This template could just as easily be a benign cyberneticist as an insane chemist or dedicated geologist.

Though hardly geared for combat, their technical skills are extremely strong. As an ally, they will provide players with guidance and skilled help, as an enemy they will be a mastermind or critical producer rather than a combatant.

If they end up in fight, corporate scientists should be unique from instance to instance. Some should be coldly rational and calm, others panicked and desperate, whatever most befits the character.

Corporate scientists will carry high-quality equipment suitable to their role, scanners, tablet PCs, analysers, and so on. Often, they will travel with more than they can carry alone and will rely on drones or assistants to act as pack mules.

With few rare exceptions scientists are disconnected, either because they always have been, or because their corporation 'down-graded' them. In the case of high ranking technical staff, cloned limb replacements were used, but among the lower tier professionals a long waiting list exists and some must make do with crutches, wheel chairs and unpowered prosthetics.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +0 | *Aim* +1 | *Recoil* +0 | *Melee* +0

TALENTS

Expert Advice

Off-turn action

When an ally performs a skill check with a skill possessed by this character, the lead scientist may provide advantage as an off-turn action.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Unarmed

AP: Padding | Range: Melee

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1–4]	[5]	[6]	

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

CORPORATE REPRESENTATIVE

Movement: 5 Dash, 10 Long Dash.

Skills: Basic +3, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+4) in *drive, spot/listen, civilised lore, intuition (people), medical, pilot*

DEFENCES

Cover 17 | Evade 12 | Base 5

IC Disconnected

Armour: Fibreweave vest over a corporate uniform, though full combat armour is available if significant danger is expected.

Wounds Tolerance: 0

Description

While most expeditions outside of the arcology are comprised exclusively of ginbushi, there are times when this is not appropriate. An item requiring retrieval may be too sensitive, or a negotiation may require a direct zaibatsu employee.

For these purposes, the corporations send corporate representatives. Selected from the boldest employees, these individuals are given a crash course on the outside world by the ginbushi and then deployed. Those who survive their first week become canny and capable individuals.

When threatened, a corporate representative can, and will, defend themselves, but their priority is generally their own survival. They are rarely seen without a ginbushi escort and won't start a fight unless they're confident of a victory.

Representatives are disconnected and have no augmentations, but will generally carry trauma kits, survival kits, and whatever other gear is appropriate for their mission.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +3 | *Aim* +1 | *Recoil* +3 | *Melee* +1

TALENTS

Corrective Action

Incidental

If the corporate representative misses with an *aimed* or *snapshot* attack, they may immediately make a volley or autofire attack versus the same target, following all the normal rules for that attack.

Weapon Attacks

Auto Pistol

AP: Fibreweave | Range: Medium

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Shot Through
[1]	[2–4]	[5]	[6]

Burst

ANDROID

Movement: 5 Dash, 10 Long Dash.

Skills: Basic +5, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+6) in one skill appropriate to function

DEFENCES

Cover 17 | Evade 12 | Base 5

IC 14

Armour: None, androids wear an appropriate corporate uniform

Wounds Tolerance: 0 (Painless)

Painless: Androids have no wounds tolerance, but they do not feel pain, will not bleed out, and cannot go into shock. They can only be killed through a critical or maiming wound to one of the following locations: Head, eyes, heart, lungs, sternum, armpit or kidneys

Significant injury to other location should still impact their ability to fight. Easy to slow, difficult to stop.

Description

Different corporations have different levels of confidence in the isolation of their internal networks. Some of the boldest corporations still operate an android workforce. These mechanical humanoids are most frequently seen either as servants for the executives or working in high-risk professions where human dexterity is required but organic fragility is not.

All androids have similar physical and mental capabilities, being, in particular, much stronger than normal humans. What differs most among androids is the degree to which they can pass as human. Cheaper androids may be human-shaped, but still constructed from clearly synthetic materials and behave in an extremely mechanical fashion. Top-end models are almost indistinguishable from their flesh and blood counterparts and are programmed with an extensive library of human behaviours that they can mimic with uncanny accuracy.

Despite their apparent intelligence, even top-end androids are still just ANI systems. They can only operate within a predefined schema and will respond to unexpected stimulus with catatonia. In combat, some androids will fight, some will run, and some may just stand their ground blankly until they're cut down, all dependant on their programming.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +2 | *Aim* +2 | *Recoil* +2 | *Melee* +2

WEAPON ATTACKS

Unarmed

AP: Fibreweave | Range: Melee

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

William Kwan (Quoc) 36187234

SHINOBI

Movement: 7 Dash, 14 Long Dash.

Skills: Basic +2, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+6) in *react, stealth, spot/listen, acrobatics, defeat security, disguise, sleight of hand, spycraft*

DEFENCES

Cover 20 | Evade 17 | Base 5

IC Disconnected

Armour: Infiltrator armour – fibreweave, normally under some form of disguise

Wounds Tolerance: 2

Description

While the ginbushi are the 'public' warrior houses of the corporations, they were not the only ones. In the pre-Shatter world there was another house, though it earned many fanciful names – the Faceless Clan, the Shadow Clan, the House of Scorpions – but those who truly knew it referred to it simply as the Paper Guild.

Where the ginbushi trained adoptees to have a singular corporate identity, the Paper Guild trained orphans to have no identity at all. They could serve anyone, become anyone, and that made them ideal spies and assassins for hire. Their one loyalty was to the Guild, as often out of fear as respect, for the Guild would not hesitate to put its own contract on any rogue agent. Though most often employed by the corporations, the Guild has at some time served everyone from private grudge-holders to Imperial nobility.

The shinobi of the Paper Guild consider themselves above 'the rabble', a grouping that includes anyone they can fool and by extension – almost everyone who isn't another shinobi. They particularly detest the ginbushi, sometimes from a sense of rivalry and sometimes from a sense of jealousy – two children from the same orphanage might go on to live very different existences should one be selected by the samurai, and one by the Guild.

Contrary to the media portrayal of ninja using all manner of exotic equipment, most shinobi do more with less. While the Guild can gain access to almost any piece of technology, the reality is that unusual equipment and weaponry stands out. Most shinobi hide in plain sight and approach their targets through patience and guile rather than elaborate gadgets.

In the pre-Shatter world, some shinobi were augmented, even nano-augmented. While these agents are still around, the same augmentations that once helped them blend in will now bar their access. Most active guild members in the post-Shatter world are those highly skilled disconnected.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +6 | *Aim* +6 | *Recoil* +4 | *Melee* +6

TALENTS

Anatomy

Incidental

When making a stealth attack the shinobi may use the Weak-Point Hit Location Table to determine hit location.

Assassinate

Incidental

When making a stealth attack with a short melee weapon, the shinobi does not roll for damage and instead assumes the maximum possible damage result for your weapon.

This attack must still hit, and damage may still be modified or negated by armour and wounds tolerance.

This talent cannot be used for ranged attacks (eg throwing a tanto or shuriken) but can be used for unarmed attacks.

Weapon Attacks

Unarmed

AP: Padding | Range: Melee

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1–3]	[4–5]	[6]	

Tantō

AP: Fibreweave | Range: Melee

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Run Through
[1–2]	[3–4]	[5–6]	

Concealed, Poisoned (neurotoxin)

Neurotoxin: At the start of each turn the victim must make an *endurance* [15] check or suffer a point of mental trauma. If a character's injuries equal their wounds tolerance, they go into shock.

Silenced Light Pistol

AP: Fibreweave | Range: Short

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Shot Through
[1]	[2–4]	[5]	[6]

Concealed, silenced

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

EXECUTIVE

Movement: 5 Dash, 10 Long Dash.

Skills: Basic +3, Unskilled +4

Skilled (+10) in *resist, civilised Lore, intuition (people), work (business management)*

DEFENCES

Cover 18 | Evade 14 | Base 5

IC 17

Armour: Personal Shield – steel, expires 10 minutes after first successful attack

Wounds Tolerance: 5

Description

This template represents the highest level of corporate executives, such as the director or CEO of a zaibatsu. These individuals will avoid direct combat at all costs and, whether ally or villain, will generally be an indirect influence on the party.

If forced into combat, an executive will rely heavily on their allies and will focus on extracting themselves to a safe place. Despite this, executives are generally nano-tech augmented, and this makes them formidable opponents if they are pinned down.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +3 | *Aim* +6 | *Recoil* +3 | *Melee* +3

Feats of Will: 5

TALENTS

Incentivise with Quarterly Bonus

Incidental, once per round

An executive can spend a feat of will to give one ally in medium range an immediate turn. This ally still gets their normal turn and will effectively act twice this round.

Place on Performance Management Program

Off-turn Action, once per round

When an ally within medium range misses with an attack, or fails a skill roll, an executive may spend a feat of will to give them an immediate re-roll.

Brand Loyalty

Off-turn Action, once per round

When an executive is the target of a successful hit, they may select one ally within short range. That ally immediately moves to the square between the executive and the source of the attack and suffers the damage instead. If the attack is a blast, the executive is moved up to four squares towards the nearest edge of the blast.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Particle Needler

AP: Fibreweave | Range: Medium

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Shot Through
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Burst only, no munitions cost

Beam Ring

AP: Steel | Range: Short

Grazed	Lacerated	Crippled	Cleaved
	[1]	[2–4]	[5–6]

One-shot, concealed, beam

Once fired this weapon cannot be reloaded and must be discarded. As a beam weapon, it ignores magnetic screens.

HOUSE GUARDS

Movement: 5 Dash, 10 Long Dash.

Skills: Basic +3, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+4) in *drive*

DEFENCES

Cover 17 | Evade 12 | Base 5

IC Disconnected

Armour: Fibreweave vest over a corporate uniform

Wounds Tolerance: Minion

Description

All ginbushi clans maintain a sizeable force of house guards. More like traditional security guards than samurai, these individuals perform all the basic tasks that ginbushi are too valuable, and too few, to perform.

Unlike the rest of the ginbushi, the guards are not nano-augmented. House guard are heavily indoctrinated, and most are extremely loyal and will fight to the last if called on to do so.

This template can also be used for more traditional security forces. Such security might have a point less on their combat skills and arguably less commitment to fighting to the last, but their other details and equipment would be very similar.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +4 | *Aim* +4 | *Recoil* +4 | *Melee* +1

WEAPON ATTACKS

Auto Pistol

AP: Fibreweave | Range: Medium

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Shot Through
[1]	[2–4]	[5]	[6]

Burst

Submachine gun

AP: Ceramic | Range: Short

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Shot Through
[1]	[2–4]	[5]	[6]

Two-handed, burst, autofire, +1d6 to snap instead of aim

William Kwan (Quiet 36 18/23)

GINBUSHI – ASPIRANT

Movement: 6 Dash, 12 Long Dash.

Skills: Basic +3, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+6) in *resist, react, acrobatics*

DEFENCES

Cover 18	Evade 15	Base 5
	IC 13	

Armour: Kimono with a fibreweave vest

Wounds Tolerance: 3

Description

Aspirants are noviciate ginbushi, normally raised from among the house guards. After a careful selection process and several months of initial training, they have been given the nano-tech augmentation that characterises modern ginbushi.

A Whiteblade master once said that aspirants have half the skill of a true samurai, and twice the self-confidence. Whether it's wise or not, Aspirants have a lot to prove, and will often be the first into the fight.

Ginbushi are trained to be ascetic and will rarely carry any items beyond their weapons.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +6	*Aim* +0	*Recoil* +3	*Melee* +6

Feats of Skill: 2

TALENTS

Heijoshin I

Off-turn action

A ginbushi may evade the first successful attack against them each round. If caught in a blast, a ginbushi may draw from the same pool to turn a failed *react* check into a success and move further from the blast.

If attacked in melee by a character who possesses *heijoshin I* or greater, this talent may not be used.

Rei

Off-turn action

When a character attacks and misses a ginbushi, the ginbushi may spend a feat of skill to make an immediate *melee* or *snapshot* attack versus the aggressor.

This can be used even if the attack was forced to miss by *heijoshin*.

Gi

Incidental

When making a *melee* attack, the ginbushi may spend a feat of skill to use the Weak-Point Hit Location Table.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Steel Katana

AP: Fibreweave — Range: Melee

Grazed	Lacerated	Crippled	Cleaved
[1]	[2]	[3–4]	[5–6]

When wielded with two hands, the AP can be upgraded to ceramic.

Steel Wakizashi

AP: Fibreweave — Range: Melee

Grazed	Lacerated	Crippled	Cleaved
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

When wielded with two hands the AP, can be upgraded to ceramic.

Auto Pistol

AP: Fibreweave — Range: Medium

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Shot through
[1]	[2–4]	[5]	[6]

Burst

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

GINBUSHI – TRUE SAMURAI

Movement: 7 Dash, 14 Long Dash.

Skills: Basic +5, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+9) in *resist, react, acrobatics*

DEFENCES

Cover 22	Evade 19	Base 5
	IC 15	

Armour: Dō-maru – fibreweave with ceramic torso and head protection

Wounds Tolerance: 3

Description

A true samurai, also called a bladed samurai, are the rank and file of the ginbushi. Only the aspirants who have proven themselves capable of both combat and loyalty are selected to receive a nano-forged katana.

In battle, the samurai are pragmatic and calm. They display neither fear nor excitement as they work through their opponents.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +8	*Aim* +0	*Recoil* +5	*Melee* +9

Feats of Skill: 3

TALENTS

Heijoshin III

Off-turn action

A ginbushi may evade the first three successful attacks against it per round. If caught in a blast, a ginbushi may draw from the same pool to turn a failed *react* check into a success and move further from the blast.

If attacked in melee by a character who possesses *heijoshin III* or greater, this talent may not be used.

Rei

Off-turn action

When a character attacks and misses a ginbushi, the ginbushi may spend a feat of skill to make an immediate *melee* or *snapshot* attack versus the aggressor.

This can be used even if the attack was forced to miss by *heijoshin*.

Meiyo

Incidental

The ginbushi may spend a feat of skill to gain an additional *melee* attack. This talent may only be used once per round.

Gi

Incidental

When making a *melee* attack, the ginbushi may spend a feat of skill to use the Weak-Point Hit Location Table.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Nano-forged Katana

AP: Ceramic — Range: Melee

Grazed	Lacerated	Crippled	Cleaved
	[1]	[2–3]	[4–6]

When wielded with two hands, the AP can be upgraded to steel.

If a character other than the owner attempts to wield this weapon they will be attacked by the nanites within, see p. 202.

Steel Wakizashi

AP: Fibreweave — Range: Melee

Grazed	Lacerated	Crippled	Cleaved
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

When wielded with two hands, the AP can be upgraded to ceramic.

Auto Pistol

AP: Fibreweave — Range: Long

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Shot through
[1]	[2–4]	[5]	[6]

Burst

Yumi Flash Bow (Ebonsnow Ginbushi)

AP: Ceramic — Range: Medium

Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Concealable, silent, no-volley

When fired at short range, the flash bow treats its AP as steel, but it does not benefit from point-blank range attacks. A bow cannot be used for volley fire attacks.

Ginbushi Masters

Ginbushi masters are, for the better part, simply bladed samurai who have shown an aptitude for teaching. While masters have more experience, this need not translate into improved stats.

For simplicity, we recommend you use the true samurai for both masters and bladed samurai unless the master is also a major character. In the latter case, the Blademaster template may prove more appropriate.

William Kwan (Quo: 36 18/23)

GINBUSHI – BLADEMASTER

Movement: 7 Dash, 14 Long Dash.

Skills: Basic +6, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+12) in *resist, react, endurance, acrobatics, civilised lore, intuition (places/things), warcraft*

DEFENCES

Cover 28	Evade 24	Base 5
	IC 18	

Armour: Dō-maru – fibreweave with ceramic torso and head protection

Wounds Tolerance: 5

Description

Blademaster is not a ginbushi rank; rather this template is intended for a centrepiece foe or ally. This may be a ginbushi master, even house father or mother, or it may be the elite samurai that one of the heroes has been training against since they were aspirants.

Regardless of their actual origin, the blademaster is intended to be a late-game foe who poses a serious threat to any character in the party and, in the right circumstances, the party as a whole.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +10	*Aim* +0	*Recoil* +5	*Melee* +12

Feats of Skill: 3
Feats of Will: 3

TALENTS

Heijoshin III

Off-turn action

A ginbushi may evade the first three successful attacks against it per round. If caught in a blast, a ginbushi may draw from the same pool to turn a failed *react* check into a success and move further from the blast.

If attacked in melee by a character who possesses *heijoshin III* or greater, this talent may not be used.

Heijoshin Mastery

Incidental

The ginbushi may spend a feat of will, and all attacks against it count as misses until the beginning of its next turn.

Chugi

Incidental

The ginbushi may spend a feat of will to immediately cure a poison, disease, or serious wound.

Meiyo Mastery

Incidental

Spend a feat of skill to begin a combo chain. So long as no attack misses, you may make an additional follow-up attack.

Rei Mastery

Incidental

Spend a feat of will, and you may retaliate versus every attack that misses you until the beginning of your next turn.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Nano-forged Katana

AP: Ceramic — Range: Melee

Grazed	Lacerated	Crippled	Cleaved
	[1]	[2–3]	[4–6]

When wielded with two hands, the AP can be upgraded to steel.

If a character other than the owner attempts to wield this weapon, they will be attacked by the nanites within.

Steel Wakizashi

AP: Fibreweave — Range: Melee

Grazed	Lacerated	Crippled	Cleaved
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

When wielded with two hands, the AP can be upgraded to ceramic.

Gauss pistol

AP: Ceramic — Range: Medium

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2]	[3–4]	[5–6]

LAV, two-handed

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

SURVIVORS AND MERCENARIES

The average survivor, whether disconnected or augmented, is more likely to be an ally or bystander than an enemy. There simply aren't enough people left, and such differentiations as the Whisper makes between human settlements are indecipherable. Ideological differences have largely taken a back seat to the shared requirement of survival.

But of course, there are exceptions. Some survivors are so cold and hard bitten that sometimes other survivors appear like an easy source of supplies. Some have simply been driven mad and are a danger to everyone.

There are no 'raider factions', but there is the Furui Kiga, a settlement descended from the pre-Shatter criminal organisation known as Bleeding Crane. The Kiga know that both the arcologies and the survivor settlements have laws, and that as long as there are laws, there will be people who seek exceptions to them. The Kiga provide that exception. Often this just means prohibited goods, but it can also mean murder.

The Kiga are violent and posturing, but not outright hostile; indeed they require visitors to their wired bars and other sites to run their business, but they are also far from safe. People who travel alone, or with insufficient protection, often disappear in Furui Kiga territory. Occasionally other disappearances will be blamed on them as well, especially when they happen in 'safe' locations, like an arcology. Investigation into such incidences often begins and ends with driving any visiting Kiga out of town. Investigating further risks discovering the obvious truth – the Kiga will only kill someone in your settlement if someone *else* in your settlement paid them too.

As they say in Rōdō-sha – everybody hates the Furui Kiga, but everybody needs the Furui Kiga.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

SCAVENGER

Movement: 5 Dash, 10 Long Dash.

Skills: Basic +3, Unskilled +0

Skilled (+3) in *urbcraft, engineering* and sometimes *work – farming, work – construction or work – tinker*

DEFENCES

Cover 15 | Evade 10 | Base 5

IC Disconnected

Armour: Rugged Clothing – padding

Wounds Tolerance: Minion

Description

The terms 'survivor' and 'scavenger' are almost synonymous. When not in the relative safety of their settlements, these individuals are perpetually scurrying among the shadows of decaying buildings, snatching anything of value.

While any scavenger can hold a gun, most will avoid fights at all cost. The exception is if their settlement comes under attack. Such times bring together every inhabitant because failure means massacre.

Besides their weapons, scavengers 'in the field' are usually carrying several hundred yen worth of salvage. Most will carry handguns and shotguns as 'dumb' versions of these are most easily obtained.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +2 | *Aim* +0 | *Recoil* +2 | *Melee* +2

WEAPON ATTACKS

Auto Pistol

AP: Fibreweave | Range: Medium

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Shot through
[1]	[2–4]	[5]	[6]

Burst

Shotgun

Range: Short | AP: Fibreweave

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1-2]	[3–5]	[6]	

Two-handed

When firing the shotgun roll once for damage, but three times for hit location at short range, or five times at point blank.

CRUSADER

Movement: 5 Dash, 10 Long Dash.

Skills: Basic +3, Unskilled +0

Skilled (+5) in *defeat security, urbcraft, warcraft*

DEFENCES

Cover 18 | Evade 12 | Base 5

IC Disconnected

Armour: Rugged Clothing – Padding

Wounds Tolerance: 0

Description

Crusaders are hardliners who believe that it is the obligation of survivors to deal with any and all agents of the Whisper. In practice, most efforts at stand-up fights with the Whisper end predictably, so crusaders often spend a lot more time talking about ideology than they do enacting it.

But there are exceptions – individual head-hunters, and small groups that conduct a guerrilla war versus the Whisper, slaughtering lost and berserkers alike before disappearing back into the civilian population.

Though unpopular, these types tend to be well equipped and surprisingly capable for disconnected. Specialist crusaders may occasionally show up with heavy rifles, pulse guns, or even rocket launchers.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +2 | *Aim* +5 | *Recoil* +5 | *Melee* +2

WEAPON ATTACKS

Assault Rifle

AP: Ceramic | Range: Medium

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Shot through
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Two-handed, burst, autofire

Heavy Rifle

AP: Steel | Range: Extreme

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2]	[3–4]	[5–6]

Setup (simple), two-handed, LAV

Pulse Gun

AP: Steel | Range: Medium

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Setup (full round), autofire only, two-handed, LAV, first 2 autofire attacks always trigger additional autofire attacks.

RPG

AP: Steel | Range: Medium

Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated
[1]	[2–4]	[5]	[6]

Setup (simple), Blast 15, scatters , two-handed

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

AUGMENTED SCRAPPER

Movement: 6 Dash, 12 Long Dash.

Skills: Basic +4, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+5) in *athletics, force, endurance, defeat security, urbcraft*

DEFENCES

Cover 20	Evade 14	Base 5
	IC 6	

Armour: Combat armour – padded armour with ceramic torso and head protection

Wounds Tolerance: 0

Description

A scrapper is anyone who isn't afraid to take on the Whisper's agents directly. Such individuals are almost always augmented and operate as mercenaries, seeking out well protected areas that the normal survivors won't dare.

Scrappers live alone, but they will often form into small groups to accomplish a mission. While they tend to be bold, they are mercenary by nature and a dead mercenary can't get paid. For this reason, they strive to choose their battles carefully, and if attacked or ambushed, they prefer to retreat and potentially counter-attack, rather than attempting to fend off their aggressors.

Scrappers can carry a wide variety of equipment, often survival packs, climbing gear, and occasionally something high-tech like a hand scanner. Most will have automatic weapons and frag grenades, but the occasional scrapper will field an RPG.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +5	*Aim* +0	*Recoil* +5	*Melee* +3

WEAPON ATTACKS

Tantō

AP: Fibreweave		Range: Melee	
Grazed [1–2]	Lacerated [3–4]	Crippled [5–6]	Cleaved

Concealable

Submachine gun

AP: Ceramic		Range: Medium	
Nicked [1]	Punctured [2–4]	Pierced Deeply [5]	Shot through [6]

Two-handed, burst, autofire, +1d6 to snap instead of aim

Assault Rifle

AP: Ceramic		Range: Medium	
Nicked [1]	Punctured [2–3]	Pierced Deeply [4–5]	Shot through [6]

Two-handed, burst, autofire

Frag Grenades

AP: Ceramic		Range: Short	
Singed [1]	Burned [2–3]	Charred [4–5]	Immolated [6]

Thrown, blast 10, scatters

RPG

AP: Steel		Range: Medium	
Singed [1]	Burned [2–4]	Charred [5]	Immolated [6]

Setup (simple), blast 15, scatters, two-handed

William Kwan (Quiz - 36187234)

FURUI KIGA WAKAISHU

Movement: 5 Dash, 10 Long Dash.

Skills: Basic +3, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+6) in *force, react, stealth, defeat security, disguise, sleight of hand*

DEFENCES

Cover 16 | Evade 14 | Base 5

IC 8

Armour: Rugged Clothing – Padding

Wounds Tolerance: Minion

Description

The *wakaishu*, or foot soldier, are the common enforcers of the Furui Kiga and often sport significant tattoos and even more significant posturing. For most, the wakaishu are the face of the Kiga.

Unlike the twenty-first century Yakuza, the Kiga have no rules restricting them from certain crimes, but a degree of common sense is expected. Any crime is okay, but never invite reprisal on the family or do something so public that it damages their business interests.

Many wakaishu are augmented, often with a Hercules arm or other strength-increasing implant. In order to join the clan, an augmented must also have a remotely detonated explosive implanted alongside the brainstem. The blast is not dramatic, but it's enough to cause instant death if the cyborg is ever swayed by the Whisper.

In practice, the heads of Furui Kiga know that the Whisper could disable such a device in an instant (or detonate it on a whim), but the implant serves as a test of loyalty and insurance against anyone trying to leave.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +5 | *Aim* +0 | *Recoil* +5 | *Melee* +3

WEAPON ATTACKS

Tonfa

AP: Padding | Range: Melee

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Heavy Pistol

AP: Ceramic | Range: Medium

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Two-handed

Submachine gun

AP: Ceramic | Range: Medium

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Shot through
[1]	[2–4]	[5]	[6]

Two-handed, burst, autofire, +1d6 to snap instead of aim

TECH EXPERT

Movement: 5 Dash, 10 Long Dash.

Skills: Basic +3, Unskilled +3

Skilled (+6) in *computer use, defeat security, engineering*

DEFENCES

Cover 16 | Evade 12 | Base 5

IC Disconnected

Armour: Rugged Clothing – padding

Wounds Tolerance: 3

Description

The arrival of the Whisper has created new industries and rendered many others obsolete. Most of the old-world technologists either died with the old world or struggle to make sense of the new.

The post-Shatter tech expert is a very different breed. They experiment boldly, fail resiliently, and adapt rapidly. They can use advanced computers to scan and reprogram a drone and then step into a machine shop and build a new drone from car parts with conventional mechanical tools. Their work doesn't have the precision of the arcology fabricators, but it is functional, durable, and often surprisingly creative.

Such genius is a rare gift, and not every settlement boasts a tech expert of this level. This means such individuals are extremely valuable and are among those rare few who are all but banned from leaving the safety of their home settlement. Tech experts can fight – all survivors can – but others will usually try to pull them from the battle as quickly as possible.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +4 | *Aim* +0 | *Recoil* +4 | *Melee* +2

WEAPON ATTACKS

Heavy Pistol

AP: Ceramic | Range: Medium

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Two-handed

Shotgun

Range: Short | AP: Fibreweave

Clipped	Fractured	Shattered	Pulverised
[1-2]	[3–5]	[6]	

Two-handed

When firing the shotgun roll once for damage, but three times for hit location at short range, or five times at point blank.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

WIREDIVER

Movement: 5 Dash, 10 Long Dash.

Skills: Basic +2, Unskilled +2

Skilled (+6) in *resist, computer use, defeat Security, disguise, spycraft*

DEFENCES

Cover 16	Evade 12	Base 5
	IC 18	

Armour: Rugged Clothing – padding

Wounds Tolerance: 3

Description

Wiredivers are those foolhardy enough to hack wireless servers and cautious enough to survive it. They setup VPNs, recover untainted cloud data, and buffer the wireless defences of other survivors – all critical services in the new world. Some wiredivers were pre-Shatter hackers, others were corporate e-Security officers who were exiled when the zaibatsu purged the majority of their connected. A rare few are self-taught, canny survivors whose luck held out long enough for them to gain the skill they rightly needed to begin with.

Wiredivers are very rarely allowed into settlements, even the open-minded groups recognise that someone who actively challenges the Whisper is a huge liability. This doesn't mean they're left out to dry, however; for wiredivers are a tremendous asset, and local settlements, even corporations, will frequently patrol the areas around their safe houses and draw away threats.

The best Wiredivers generally have a type II direct neural interface (certainly they must if they want to project any of the talents listed below) and many have other augmentations such as firewalls or Eternity memory extensions.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +2	*Aim* +4	*Recoil* +0	*Melee* +4

Feats of Will: 3

WEAPON ATTACKS

Auto Pistol

AP: Fibreweave — Range: Medium

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Shot through
[1]	[2–4]	[5]	[6]

Burst

TALENTS

Choose any 2 of the following

Machinesia

Incidental, +6 vs IC

A wirediver may spend a feat of will to surround themself with programs designed to remove all record of their passing. These programs remain active for 12 hours (but the deletions they perform are permanent).

The programs can't affect human memory, or that of ANI systems, but they will otherwise delete camera recordings, login/logout records and even mentions in diary entries.

Tech Curse

Incidental, once per round, +6 vs IC

A wirediver may target a single piece of wireless-linked electronics. That item is jammed up and cannot perform any action until the beginning of next round.

A car is not a single piece of electronics; however, its brake controls or its GPS are. On an augmented being, each separate augment is considered a piece of electronics.

Affecting augmented or robots requires a *computer use* roll versus their IC defence.

IFF Failure

Off-turn Action, +6 vs IC

A wirediver may spend a feat of will and make a *computer use* versus IC attack to interrupt any successful attack roll by an augmented being or machine. They then select a new target that is valid for the shooter and in their own line of sight. The attack, with its existing roll, is transferred to the new target.

Manipulate

Simple Action, +6 vs IC

A wirediver may spend a feat of will and make a *computer use* versus IC attack. In place of the target's next turn, the wirediver may immediately assign them a full round of actions. Any action the target could normally take can be forced upon them.

Heroic characters hit by this talent choose to suffer a mental trauma wound lieu of succumbing to the talent, unless doing so would render them unconscious or dead.

Gatekeeper

Off-turn Action

Once per round when an ally fails a *resist* check versus any form of wireless attack, a wirediver may reroll on their behalf, using their own *resist* skill. The better result applies.

Alternatively, if the wireless attack targets an IC score, you may substitute your *resist* roll for the IC defence.

Wall Program

Simple Action

A wirediver can create a wall that covers one edge of two squares (or it can corner one square) and lasts until the end of the encounter. The wall may be anywhere between one and two metres tall and is semi-transparent.

The program is only visible to machines and augmented individuals (friendly or otherwise), but they may not attack or move through it and must treat it, in every respect, as a solid object.

Decompile

Simple Action, +9 attack vs IC

A wirediver may launch an attack directly versus an active program. Simple programs (walls, decoys etc.) are destroyed automatically. More complex programs (like banshees) have a wounds tolerance and will instead suffer a point of mental trauma.

If the target has an IC defence, you must make a successful attack roll against it.

William Kwan (Quiet) 36187234

SETTLEMENT HEADMAN/ HEADWOMAN

Movement: 5 Dash, 10 Long Dash.

Skills: Basic +4, Unskilled +3

Skilled (+8) in *endurance, spot/listen, urbcraft*

DEFENCES

Cover 20 | Evade 14 | Base 5

IC Disconnected

Armour: Combat armour – padded armour with ceramic torso and head protection

Wounds Tolerance: 5

Description

Most settlements formed around a practiced survivalist – perhaps a former special forces agent, perhaps a doomsday prepper, or perhaps just an Averyn with huge charisma and the right ideas. Six years after the Shatter, these individuals rarely see combat directly; most settlements see their continued existence as being tied to the survival of the one who brought them together.

But these village masters are not to be taken lightly. Most had the strength to go it alone, and it was only by choice that they helped others. If pressed, the settlement head will fight, and fight well.

While presented below with a heavy pistol, we strongly recommend you individually characterise the village heads as much as possible. Perhaps they are a *miko* (shrine maiden) and deadly accurate with a yumi, perhaps they are a deadly sniper, or even a blademaster trained from birth by their ginbushi parents yet never inducted into one of the clans.

And always keep in mind a settlement leader can be an alien. Such a leader might well field unusual weaponry in a fight.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +8 | *Aim* +8 | *Recoil* +6 | *Melee* +6

TALENTS

Concentrate your fire!

Complex Action

The headman can select up to five allies and a single target. All five allies may make an immediate attack versus the target as an incidental action.

Aim for its weakness!

Off-turn Action

Once per round when an ally within medium range is about to make an attack, the headman can set that attack to use the Weak-Point Hit Location Table.

Get clear!

Off-turn Action

Once per round, when an enemy has made a successful weapon attack roll versus an ally, the ally may move up to their speed to a new location, and the attack is changed to a miss.

Alternately the settlement leader may choose one ally caught under a blast template to move the minimum squares to escape the blast and shrapnel area.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Heavy Pistol

AP: Ceramic		Range: Medium	
Clipped [1]	Fractured [2–3]	Shattered [4–5]	Pulverised [6]

Two-handed

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

ANIMALS

The Shatter, by its very nature, did not target animals, and with the massive reduction in number of humans, animals have thrived. Most of this activity occurs beyond the cities, where herds of animals both native and introduced roam in great numbers, grazing on disused farmland.

These creatures do occasionally make their way into the cities, and others began there. Wild dogs are a common sight, and many settlements and even augmented scrappers keep them as pets and allies. Escaped lab beasts prowl the shadows of ruined facilities, feeding on the deceased staff until released by careless salvagers. Vermin are numerous, but pre-Shatter systems to curtail their numbers continue to lock them out of certain areas.

Most animals have little interest in getting in a fight with humans, though some will if cornered or starving. This is likely to be a poor choice on the animal's part; even a simple firearm is more than a match for most animals.

RAT

Movement: 6 Dash, 12 Long Dash.

Skills: Basic -5, Unskilled +0

Skilled (+5) in *react, resist, spot/listen, stealth, urbcraft*

DEFENCES

Cover 20 | Evade 17 | Base 10

IC Disconnected

Wounds Tolerance: Minion

Description

The term 'rat' now encompasses a fantastic number of vermin species, from the *Rattus rattus* of Earth to a myriad of alien creature similar in form and function. While such common distinctions are technically incorrect, the opinion of the average survivor is that any small furry scavenger with a tendency to burrow through walls and too much tenacity to be rightly called a 'mouse' is a rat.

While not a direct threat to survivors, rats can be disease carriers, and so most settlements make use of huge stocks of rat poison from supermarket shelves to keep their local areas clear.

Despite their bad reputation, rats are quite intelligent and, if domesticated, can be quite fastidious animals.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap – | *Aim* – | *Recoil* – | *Melee* +6

WEAPON ATTACKS

Tiny Teeth and claws

AP: Unarmoured | Range: Melee

Grazed	Lacerated	Crippled	Cleaved
[1–6]			

TAMARIN MONKEY

Movement: 6 Dash, 12 Long Dash

Skills: Basic -3, Unskilled +3

Skilled (+5) in *react, stealth, acrobatics, sleight of hand, wildscraft*

DEFENCES

Cover 18 | Evade 15 | Base 8

IC Disconnected

Wounds Tolerance: Minion

Description

Tamarin are very small monkeys, weighing less than a kilo and only about thirty centimetres long not counting their almost forty-centimetre-long prehensile tail. They are grey furred with distinctive white 'moustaches' and brown tails.

Tamarin are intelligent and dexterous and can be both domesticated and trained.

This template can be used for most breeds of small monkey.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap – | *Aim* – | *Recoil* – | *Melee* +6

TALENTS

Natural Climbers

Climbing is as natural as walking for Tamarin. They may climb any non-sheer surface without requiring a check. Further they gain 1d6 advantage on all rolls to jump from perch to perch while climbing.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Small Teeth and claws

AP: Padding | Range: Melee

Grazed	Lacerated	Crippled	Cleaved
[1-4]	[5–6]		

William Kwan (Quo: 36187234)

DOG

Movement: 6 Dash, 12 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +2, Unskilled +3

Skilled (+3) in *intuition (people), intuition (places/things), urbcraft*

DEFENCES

Cover 16 | Evade 13 | Base 6

IC Disconnected

Wounds Tolerance: Minion

Description

Like rats, the dogs of the Verdant Crest consist of a lot more than the basic canines of Earth. It seems the galaxy has no shortage of quadrupedal pack hunters that can be domesticated for their loyalty. Pre-Shatter a great deal of wireless bandwidth was consumed by arguments over which dog species were the most intelligent.

Trained dogs will follow simple instructions from their master and will not flee combat unless their master does also. Wild dogs will tend to operate in packs, and in this instance, they will follow the alpha-dog's lead, retreating if the alpha is killed.

Dog packs will only attack humans that are isolated and appear sick or injured. Starving packs will take greater risks, but an attack on a full party of players is still unlikely.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap – | *Aim* – | *Recoil* – | *Melee* +4

TALENTS

Scent Tracking

Dogs can track other creatures by scent. They may follow any animal that has passed through an area in the last 24 hours without a check.

Trails that pass through water or strong scents will confuse the animal, and an *urbcraft* or *wildscraft* check will be required to relocate the trail.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Bite

AP: Padding | Range: Melee

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Bitten through
[1–2]	[3–4]	[5–6]	

Unrelenting bite – once a dog has latched on, it won't let go except to make another attack. If this attack hits any arm or leg location, that limb can only be moved by an opposed *force* check versus the dog.

GREY HAWK

Movement: Special (See 'Flight' below)

Skills: Basic -3, Unskilled +1

Skilled (+8) in *Spot/listen*

DEFENCES

Cover 18 | Evade 23 | Base 7

IC Disconnected

Wounds Tolerance: Minion

Description

Grey hawks are one of the smaller members of the raptor group, being about sixty centimetres in length and under half a kilogram in weight. Grey hawks are very agile for a hawk of their size and are known for their tenacity.

All raptors are intelligent for birds, and grey hawks can be trained to both hunt and retrieve. Without training, most hawks will avoid humans completely.

This template can be used for any reasonable sized bird of prey.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap – | *Aim* – | *Recoil* – | *Melee* +8

TALENTS

Flight

Raptors are tailored for high-speed flight, and most achieve horizontal speeds of over forty kilometres an hour.

Based on this, it's reasonable to assume that a hawk can reach any tile on a combat map in a single round.

Further, the hawk's high *evade* defence assumes it to be in flight. Caught on the ground, a grey hawk may use only its *base* defence.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Talons

AP: Padding | Range: Melee

Grazed	Lacerated	Crippled	Cleaved
[1–3]	[4–6]		

Any natural 10 or higher on a talons attack triggers a beak attack.

Beak

AP: Fibreweave | Range: Melee

Grazed	Lacerated	Crippled	Cleaved
[1–2]	[3–5]	[6]	

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

WOLFLIONS

Movement: 7 Dash, 14 Long Dash

Skills: Basic +6, Unskilled +3

Skilled (+6) in *intuition (people), intuition (places/things), wildscraft*

DEFENCES

Cover 16	Evade 14	Base 5
	IC Disconnected	

Wounds Tolerance: 1

Description

The wolflion is a native predator to an isolated world on the rimward edge of the Verdant Crest. They are wolf-like in temperament and instinct, but more similar to a lion in stature, with coarse white crests and vibrant blue eyes that give them a dramatic silhouette in any light.

Wolflions are pack hunters, living in groups of ten to twelve individuals. When hunting, they will break off into groups of two or three and encircle their prey, bracketing an animal that takes flight into the waiting jaws of an ambush.

Wolflions are intelligent, but their intelligence is often undermined by their fierce aggression. When threatened, a wolflion seems almost incapable of backing down and will always attack. If encountered in the wild, the safest thing to do is behave meekly and hope the animal spares you.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap –	*Aim –*	*Recoil –*	*Melee +8*

TALENTS

Scent Tracking

Wolflions can track other creatures by scent. They may follow any animal that has passed through an area in the last 24 hours without a check.

Trails that pass through water or strong scents will confuse the animal, and an *urbcraft* or *wildscraft* check will be required to relocate the trail.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Large Claws x2

AP: Fibreweave — Range: Melee

Grazed	Lacerated	Crippled	Cleaved
[1]	[2–3]	[4–6]	

Pounce – if the wolflion moved at least three squares to reach the target it performs a leap attack. In addition to the normal damage, roll an *opposed force* check. On success, the target is knocked down and pinned beneath the wolflion; it may still use its hands and feet but cannot get up without succeeding at an *opposed force* check.

Bite

AP: Ceramic — Range: Melee

Nicked	Punctured	Pierced Deeply	Bitten Through
	[1–2]	[2–4]	[5–6]

Killing bite – if a target is pinned, the wolflion may choose its hit location for bite attacks and adds 1d6 advantage to its chance to hit.

William Kwan (Order: 36187234)

CREATING NEW ALLIES AND OPPONENTS

We've provided dozens of beings to populate your world and challenge your players – but nothing brings spice to a game like a custom opponent. Imagine if your players start headhunting suzerains and they're suddenly confronted by a creature that is both suzerain and ronin. Perhaps they flee the city to a forest, only to be pursued by a vast pack of augmented wolves.

Below we'll walk you through a step-by-step process for putting together a custom opponent (or ally)[†]. Before you jump in, though, consider whether or not you can just adjust an existing entry. If you want to make a shinobi sniper, then it'd be a piece of cake to take the existing template and give it a heavy rifle (or better yet a yumi flash bow).

[†]Note we will use the term opponent throughout this section with the understanding that any opponent could conceivably also be an ally and vice versa. Circumstances are unpredictable, and apocalypses can make for strange and often uncertain bedfellows. The term we are choosing *not* to use here is NPC (non-player character). The term NPC is best understood as an opponent/ally who has a role to play that goes beyond the simple intersection of their abilities and the circumstance of their encounter with the players. And so, a shinobi sniper paid to assassinate one of the players might play out as nothing more than an opponent to be defeated. Conversely, a simple settlement farmer who ends up hiding a wounded augmented player from an angry mob of crusaders might well end up with a larger role to play later in the campaign and thus become an NPC.

DON'T SWEAT THE DETAIL

The opponents we have presented throughout this book will contain a lot more detail than you should ever make for creatures of your own. Unlike us, you know whether any given opponent will ever see a lick of combat and you know your gun-toting warbot will never make a skill check that isn't *aim*, *snapshot*, *recoil* or *melee*.

If your opponent is purely non-combat, then don't waste time figuring out its weapons loadout, combat skills, and tactics. Obviously, they'll need some skills, but don't waste time coming up with an exhaustive skill list when you know a character will only be called on to use one or two skills.

Using this approach, you'll be caught out eventually, the players will *start* a fight in that Shinto temple where no one is threatening them. If this happens, it's easy enough to come up with a number on the fly that makes sense. Even if you need a minute to think about it, you'll deliver better sessions if you take that minute during the game instead of spending twenty minutes extra on every opponent in case the campaign goes in an obscure direction.

STEP 1: THE CONCEPT

The concept is the most important component, and often the most fun as well. It is simply the reason *why* you want to create this creature – what does it bring to the game that the pre-built opponents do not? This doesn't need to be elaborate, but it should be evocative in some way.

> When my characters visit the tight quarters of the Hulgari container settlement, I really want them to face a lost that charges at them and explodes! Working title is Berserker – Exploder.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

STEP 2: LEVEL BASED STATS

The easiest starting point for determining your new opponent's stats is the level you expect the players to be at when they might first face such a creature with the expectation that they defeat it.

To make use of the table below, you'll need to determine your opponent's main combat stat: *aim*, *snapshot*, *recoil*, *melee* or some combination thereof. Think about how you want your opponent to fight on the battlefield, if they're going to move around a lot, then *snapshot* should be their main combat skill, if they're more of a static defender, than *aim* or *recoil* make more sense.

Note that an opponent might not *have* a main combat skill – a corporate scientist might be very skilled, just not at shooting things.

STAT	Starting Value
Basic	½ Level
Unskilled	½ Level
Skilled	Level
Main Combat Skill	Level
All Other Combat Skills	½ Level
Cover	15 + ½ Level*
Evade	10 + ½ Level*
Base	5

** This assumes the opponent will be fought in groups. For a solo opponent, it's best to use the full, rather than half, level for this.*

I imagine that these exploders will always be a menace (throw a few into a horde of scamps, and you up the ante significantly), but I want the players to be able to fight these now, not run from them.

Since my players are currently Level 2, that means I'll be basing everything off that. I've made *melee* the main combat skill, not that I expect exploders to be doing much of anything except exploding.

STEP 3: CHOOSE SKILLS

Now that we have a 'Skilled' bonus, it's time to decide what skills this character is good at. Try not to go overboard – limiting yourself to three to five skills will ensure your characters have both strengths and weaknesses.

I played briefly with the idea of giving the exploders the stealth skill but discarded it. If a ninja exploder dropped from the ceiling and killed the whole party, I suspect I would be the only one at the table who thought it was cool.

But I decided I did want to do something a little different than just 'a painless with a pocket mine' so I've given the exploder the acrobatics skill. At this point, I'm envisioning these things scrambling and leaping towards the players like some kind of simian.

As I consider this, I realise these things should be Hulgari. It's perfect for the setting, and the Hulgari were a tree-climbing people, and they probably threw out their augmented like everyone else. The Whisper, it seems, found a purpose for them.

STEP 4: WEAPONS, TALENTS AND WIRELESS ATTACKS

If you're creating an opponent for your players, this will probably be where you spend the majority of your time. Since most opponents use conventional equipment, this is often just a matter of finding one or more appropriate weapons. One thing to keep in mind is that anything you place in the game world can end up in the players' hands – don't give a blast cannon to a villain if you're not prepared to deal with the players inheriting it.

Giving your opponent talents, wireless powers, and other special attacks is exactly the same, just find something from the class talents in the *Play Guide* or borrow an ability from one of the existing creatures in this book.

To really take things to the next level, try giving your character a custom talent.

No reason not to keep it simple here – the pocket mine explodes just fine. I'll have the exploder arm it as a simple action, and it'll explode at the end of the creatures *next* turn. Canny players could turn this thing against its own side.

Oh, and I'll give it the *natural climbers* talent since it's a Hulgari now.

William Kwan (Quiet) 36187234

CREATING CUSTOM TALENTS

Since the only real limit on talents is what your players will accept, the advice we can provide here is limited. The best thing to do is experiment – start with talents that seem interesting without being hugely lethal or disruptive and work your way up. Until you're confident in your abilities try not to include more than one custom talent in any given encounter.

When you're creating a talent, consider the below:

It should match the concept

If your custom creature is a huge augmented beast that shrugs off bullet wounds, it would be strange to give it a talent similar to *heijoshin*. This hulking monstrosity doesn't evoke a sense of high-speed evasion, so such an ability would stretch the players' acceptance.

Ideally custom talents should be core to the new creature's concept. An augmented brute would be better served by a talent that reduces or regenerates incoming wounds.

Make it do something other than just inflict damage

It can be dangerously easy to see 'inflicting damage' as the function of all creatures and talents. For the GM at least, this is not true, your goal is to create entertainment.

To that end, try to make talents that are not focused on inflicting damage, but on changing the way the encounter plays out. Hitting a player with a poison that gives them an immediate free turn and then paralyses them for a round is far more interesting than one that just kills them. Let your creativity off the hook.

Be prepared to never use it

This is most important if your new creation is a unique character that will oppose the players. As established earlier in this book, heroes have a nose for dangerous opponents and will tend to target them with extreme prejudice. It's important not to become so invested in a character and its abilities that you don't want it to die.

The good news is that a talent that goes unused might be usable on a different opponent later. It might require some stylistic changes, but you'll be the only one who'll know if what was once a poison, becomes a wireless attack in the hands of its new owner.

STEP 5: CHOOSE GEAR AND AUGMENTATION

Gear and augmentations are often purely cosmetic components. Since we only see most opponents for a fraction of their lives, we're unlikely to see one pick a lock or need to increase their build maximum. In most cases, it's safe to assume opponents can gain access to any gear they critically need to play their part in the story.

That said, these items might be salvaged to be used by the players. They can also do wonders to build character – "the man huddled in the shadows was as thin and wiry as the lockpicks at his belt".

Once you know how many augmentations your opponent has, you can determine the IC defence as: 10 + *resist* – 2 per augment.

Well this Hulgari should be augmented, but statistics tell us that most would just have a DNI, so I think I'll stick with that. I don't think they'll have any significant gear, as lost they'll be carrying whatever miscellany they had when the Shatter hit.

Its IC will end up at 10.

STEP 6: ARMOUR AND WOUNDS TOLERANCE

Anything you plan to put multiples of into a fight should generally be minions. This is a simple mechanics issue that prevents you having to keep track of the wounds for dozens of discrete opponents.

If you want an enemy to be able to anchor a formation, you might give it one or two wound points. Higher numbers should really be reserved for unique character opponents and large creatures whose mass suggests they will take a beating.

Selecting armour will determine what sort of firepower this thing will be vulnerable to. It's okay to make the primary armour very difficult for the players to breach, provided they can defeat the weak points. Such foes are a very different tactical challenge.

Since the Hulgari are meant to be pretty fragile, I think I'll go ahead and make this thing a minion. No armour for these guys, if they're leaping from container to container, I think they need to stay light.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

STEP 7: FINALISE STATS

Now that you have the shape of your character, it's time to sand and polish. For each stat, allow yourself the option to make a one or two-point change, higher or lower, to better reflect the character concept. If something is *critical* to the concept, you might change it much more aggressively.

Okay so this thing needs to stand some chance of getting to our heroes, so I'm going to bump its *evade* score up by four. I want dealing with this thing to be more complicated than just assigning the players' worst shot to blowing it away.

Next, I'm going to add another 2 to its 'Skilled' score, acrobatics is the only skill I gave it so that doesn't seem unfair. Meanwhile, I'm going to dial the 'Unskilled' stat to 0 – I don't feel like a lost should be particularly good at many things. While I'm at it I'm going to 0 the other combat skills too, the Whisper wants these things to kill themselves, not get clever with firearms. Lastly I'm going to actually adjust the blast escape DC for the pocket mine down to 15. The 18 was based on the idea of someone standing on the mine and having very little time to react which isn't the case with our Hulgari bomber.

Here is my berserker exploder for your consideration:

BERSERKER – EXPLODER

Movement: 4 Dash, 8 Long Dash.

Skills: Basic +1, Unskilled +0

Skilled (+4) in *acrobatics*

DEFENCES

Cover 15	Evade 14	Base 5
	IC 10	

Armour: None

Wounds Tolerance: Minion

Description

A Hulgari with a bomb, a mission, and the hundred-yard stare of the lost. It clambers spiderlike across rooftops and drainpipes, an explosive charge in one gaunt claw.

The exploder will use long dash actions to get within 12 tiles of its foe. Then it will dash closer and arm its mine. The next round it will long dash again.

COMBAT SKILLS

Snap +0	*Aim* +0	*Recoil* +0	*Melee* + 2

TALENTS

Natural Climbers

Climbing is as natural as walking for Hulgari. They may climb any non-sheer surface without requiring a check. Further, they gain 1d6 advantage on all rolls to jump from perch to perch while climbing.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Pocket Mine

AP: Ceramic — Range: Melee

Singed	Burned	Charred	Immolated
[1]	[2–3]	[4–5]	[6]

Blast 15, one-handed

Armed with a simple action, detonates at the end of the exploder's next turn, killing the exploder and likely anyone nearby.

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APPENDIX I

DIGITAL CONSCIOUSNESS TRANSFER

No character starts as an ascended intelligence (AI), but it is possible for a character to attain ascension. This process is not known to be reversible, and while it conveys significant powers, it has a few key drawbacks.

Why AI?
In many respects an ascended intelligence is very different from the 'artificial intelligence' that the term applies to today. So why use 'AI' if its misleading?

The main reason is *because* it's misleading. Our test GMs found it very useful so that when they accidently slipped up and called the software the players picked up an 'AI fragment' they didn't give up the game about digital consciousness transfer. In fact such slip ups played to the players general expectation that the Whisper was a synthetic creation from some lab somewhere.

Things were very different when GMs accidently blurted out the word 'ascended'.

INTANGIBILITY

Both the greatest strength and weakness of an AI is that it has no tangible form. In game terms, this means the following applies:

Where can it go
Because they rely on wireless networks to establish a presence, an ascended intelligence may not manifest itself into location where absolutely no network exists. Fortunately, as long as one other party member is augmented, the AI will be able to accompany the party anywhere they go.

What does it mean to have a presence?
Think of a digital consciousness of an ascended intelligence like an iceberg, a tiny fraction is visible above the water, that being the wireless, while the vast majority of the entity exists beneath the waterline, in planar space.

This wireless presence is critical as it allows the entity to sense, and therefore affect, the real world. Without that link, the AI would be just another harmless planar entity.

Just as large icebergs can breach the surface in multiple places, it is possible for an AI to have multiple presences in diverse locations, but one must always be the primary. The primary location is where ascended intelligence is presently focusing the main of its attention, and it's the only place it can actively manifest powers.

The advantage of secondary manifestations is that they may sustain previously employed talents and provide fall-back points should the primary location have its networks destroyed.

While many ascended intelligences will project a hologram into the wireless where their primary presence is located, it is not necessary to do so. That said, the force of an AI creates unique noise in the wireless that unmistakably announces the presence, if not intent, of a digital consciousness.

How does it move?
Across local distances, an ascended intelligence's primary manifestation moves at the speed of light, so functionally it may move to any location as an incidental action but may still only do so once per round. They may not move, take an action, and then move again.

An ascended intelligence may, of course, travel aboard a ship by inhabiting its networks, but it is relevant that an AI may travel independently of any starship provided a planar transmitter exists.

In general, secondary manifestations do not move on their own; however, it is possible for an AI to create numerous secondary manifestations and send them out to target destinations from a transmitter. This allows an ascended intelligence to propagate its presence without the primary manifestation being trapped between worlds for long periods.

Because the AI is linked to all of its manifestations at all times, it may make any manifestation the primary at the beginning of any round.

How can it interact with the physical world?
It can't. At least not directly.
All physical actions, pulling, pushing, lock picking, and so on are no longer possible for the AI. Its interactions

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are limited to wireless messages, *computer use* checks and talents used on people and devices with wireless connections within a hundred metres of its primary manifestation.

How do you kill it?
Because of their decentralised structure, ascended intelligences are extremely difficult to kill. Unless specifically noted in an ability, even AIs may not directly attack one another.

If it has few manifestations, you can attempt to destroy the networks it has access to, but this is more difficult than it sounds. If a network is destroyed, the tendrils connecting the wireless to planar space remain and can reach out to a distance of approximately five hundred million kilometres, meaning it can jump to networks on other planets or ships in the system, even if they arrive later.

The only other known method is for another ascended intelligence to force it into one or more linked wireless individuals using the *Coil of Mortality* talent. If those individuals are then terminated, the trapped ascended intelligence dies with them.

It is also rumoured that the most powerful of the Whisper's aspects (the UR-aspect) has the capacity to consume other consciousnesses.

LEVELLING UP

AI characters grow in strength as they absorb psychic energy from emotional highs and lows of beings connected to networks where the ascended intelligence has a primary or secondary manifestation.

Exactly how much psychic energy is gained from an activity, and how long it will take an AI to level up, is up to the GM. It is not a given that an AI will level-up as fast as its biological colleagues.

PHYSICAL TRAIT CHANGES

When a character undergoes digital consciousness transfer, they lose their physical traits, and those scores are transferred to new traits relevant to their intangible state.

The changes are as follows:

No Racial Limits
Regardless of your previous racial limits, an AI can have up to 12 points in any attribute. On level-up, an ascended gains 1 point in each attribute.

Build becomes Integrity
Integrity is the measure of the consciousness that holds the AI together. As before, this determines wounds tolerance.

Wounds tolerance has a more critical meaning for an AI since when it loses its last wound, it effectively ceases to exist, fortunately there are few enough ways this can happen.

Perception becomes Veracity
Veracity is the AI's natural pervasiveness, its ability to locate network systems and propagate its code onto them. See Local Network Strength below for more details.

Agility
While the term for agility does not change, it now represents digital agility. An AI may take one action (such as rolling *computer use* to hack a computer) for each point of agility they have, every round.

Alternatively, they may manifest new talents up to a total LNS-cost equalling their agility. Any combination of talents use and other acctions is permissible, in any order.

Sustaining a talent does not count towards the talent limit unless otherwise stated.

Cybernetics
Any bonuses to physical traits from augmentations are lost.

However in lieu of these cybernetics characters get access to a whole new realm of hardware possibilities. To reflect this, you may add a total of 1d4 to any of your physical traits. For example a character who rolled a 3 might elect to add 2 to veracity and 1 to intelligence.

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SKILL CHANGES

As a result of its new form, a number of changes happen to the AI's skills.

Combat Skills
An ascended intelligence loses all its combat skills as it transcends crude physical confrontations.

This includes all defences except IC.

Basic Skills
The following skills are lost as they cannot be performed by an AI: *athletics* and *force*.

The *endurance* skill remains but is now based on integrity. *Spot/Listen* is now veracity based.

Regardless of their previous class and origin AI's are considered to be trained in *react*, *resist* and *spot/listen*.

Advanced Skills
An AI retains all of its advanced skills at their previous value regardless of its capacity to perform them.

Computer use becomes the highest of either its previous value or the character's level.

Each level, every skill increases by one point to a maximum of 12.

LOCAL NETWORK STRENGTH (LNS)

Local network strength or LNS is a critical concept to understand for an ascended intelligence. LNS is an approximation of the available networked resources a primary manifestation can affect.

In general, a house in the middle of nowhere might have an LNS of only 1 or 2 while a warship might have 30 or 40 and a high-tech city centre might have as much as 100.

Claiming LNS
At the start of each round, an AI may claim LNS equivalent to its veracity score. If more than one ascended intelligence is operating in the same area they must roll:

1d20 + Veracity

The highest rolling ascended intelligence claims LNS from any unclaimed LNS first and then from the lowest rolling opposed AI (and next lowest and so on if necessary) until it reaches its veracity score.

After this the next highest ascended intelligence follows the same process, but it may not claim from any higher-rolling AI.

If an ascended intelligence ends up with no LNS at all, it is unable to use talents this round, but it may still contest for future rounds. An AI may also choose to give LNS freely to another AI, and this does not count towards their normal claiming limit.

Any LNS an ascended intelligence controlled in the previous round is still considered claimed, even if it was used to manifest talents (see below). LNS can only be lost if it is claimed by another AI.

Mortals Meddling in the Affairs of Gods
Any talent that would normally destroy or cause mental trauma to a program, if directed at an ascended intelligence, instead causes the AI to lose a point of LNS. This point is then considered unclaimed.

Other powers that normally affect programs, whether by confusing, trapping, or otherwise, do not affect ascended intelligences at all unless specifically stated.

Using LNS
All AI talents have an LNS cost. The total LNS cost of talents an AI uses or sustains in a single round cannot exceed the LNS it has claimed. Also note that each additional use of the same talent costs an extra point (i.e., using several instances of a talent with a listed cost of 4 would cost 4 for the first and 5 for the second, 6 for the third and so on).

If a talent fails, for any reason, the LNS remains spent until the beginning of the ascended intelligence's next turn, those system resources were dedicated to the effort.

When performing tasks where brute processing power is an advantage, an ascended intelligence may add any LNS not used for abilities to the roll, in addition to any ranks it possesses.

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TALENTS

An ascended intelligence automatically gains access to any talent for which they meet the pre-requisites.

Using Versus Sustaining

Unless otherwise noted, when an ascended intelligence first uses a talent, it rolls versus its target's IC score (as it must 'hack in'). On subsequent rounds, the AI can elect to 'sustain' the talent which means no roll versus IC needs to be made, but in some cases the target may get a *resist* roll.

Sustaining talents still carries the same LNS cost, but it does not count as an 'action' towards the agility point maximum. Additionally, an AI may *not* choose to use a talent where it could instead elect to 'sustain' the same talent on the same target.

AI TALENTS

LNS COST	SUSTAIN?	TALENT
2	Yes	And for You Time Froze
2	Yes	A Masterful Play
3	Yes	Metal Betrays Flesh
3	No	Bold, but Irrelevant
6	Special	Servant of the Wireless
10	Special	All Are Slaves
10	Yes	Will That Cannot Be Defied
4	Yes	Games of Light and Shadow
8	Yes	God of Trickery and Deceit
2	Yes	Guidance Echo
2	Yes	That Which Lurks Within
5	Yes	Confidence Barrier
5	Special	Walls of Divine Fire
0	Special	Into Oblivion
10	Yes	Coil of Mortality
12	No	Hunger Unending

And for You Time Froze – *Requires willpower 6*

The target cannot perform any actions until the beginning of the ascended intelligence's next turn. If this talent is sustained, heroic characters may spend a simple action to make a *resist* check opposed by the AIs *computer use* to break the effect.

A Masterful Play – *Requires Agility 6*

A character of the AI's choice may immediately move up to its speed as an incidental action. No *computer use* roll is required for this talent.

Metal Betrays Flesh – *Requires Veracity 3*

The ascended intelligence seizes control of a cybernetic augment belonging to a character and causes it to act, or not act, as it pleases. This is never good, if the target has a cybernetic heart this is very bad.

Bold, but Irrelevant – *Requires mechanical Aptitude 6*

The ascended intelligence selects a program it has not created and destroys it immediately. If said program has wounds tolerance it loses a wound point.

Servant of the Wireless – *Requires Veracity 6*

A non-heroic character not protected by *walls of divine fire* may be converted to a mindless slave. Sustaining this talent has no cost, and once a character is lobotomised in this manner they may not make *resist* rolls versus any talent the ascended intelligence enforces on them.

The ascended intelligence may create multiple servants but sending commands to individuals is time consuming. An AI may send a ten-word (max) directive to any number of servants but this counts towards the total number of talents the AI can use each round. If a direction is sent to multiple recipients, it must be applicable to all of them. '*Chase the motorcyclist*' will only be accepted by servants who can see someone on a motorcycle, worse still some may not be looking at the same motorcycle.

An AI may send different directives to different individuals, or a chain of directives to a single individual, but these would all count towards the limit for talent uses.

In the absence of an acceptable direction, a servant of the wireless will either be randomly inert or attempt to mimic the last activity of its previous life.

These directives remain even after the ascended intelligence has moved on.

All Are Slaves – *Requires Veracity 12*

All non-heroic characters within range of the ascended intelligence's primary or secondary manifestations are simultaneously lobotomised. The ascended intelligence need not roll to implement this talent, but any characters protected by *walls of divine fire* are automatically immune.

The ascended intelligence must have sufficient network strength to meet this talents requirement in every area that the talent is used.

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Will That Cannot Be Defied – *Requires Willpower 9*
The ascended intelligence seizes control of a target; when the target comes up in the turn order the ascended intelligence may choose how they behave. This can be used on heroic characters even if they have wounds tolerance remaining.

If this talent is sustained, heroic characters may spend a simple action to make a *resist* check opposed by the AI's *computer use* to break the effect.

Games of Light and Shadow – *Requires disguise 6*
The ascended intelligence may create a non-harmful static illusion affecting as many characters within range of its primary manifestation as it chooses. The illusion may not occupy a space bigger than a cube with a four-metre side. In addition to not being directly harmful it may not be used to obscure or hide an imminent threat.

Anyone whose IC defence the ascended intelligence beat, believes the illusion completely. While the AI may sustain the talent, no *resist* rolls are allowed unless a character in some way interacts with the illusion in a manner that would arouse suspicion.

God of Trickery and Deceit – *Requires disguise 9*
This works as with *Games of Light and Shadow,* but the rules are much more lenient. The illusion may be in motion and using *disguise* rolls it may even imitate a specific individual.

The illusion may also be of any scale and may appear harmful (such as a fire) or may hide something that is (such as making the AI's allies invisible). The one limitation is it should have a single thematic constant (an earthquake might include falling debris, gas lines rupturing, shaking ground, etc.), more than one theme behind an illusion requires an additional use of the talent (a swarm of scorpions coming out of a crack in the wall caused by an earthquake). The GM has final say on how many themes an illusion includes.

Any round a character suffers harm, they get a *resist* roll to pierce the illusion, but only once the damage has been taken. Illusory injury counts as mental trauma (though the character will mistake it for an appropriate physical injury when it's incurred).

Guidance Echo – *Requires Veracity 6*
Using this talent, the ascended intelligence creates a targeting solution program that is in place until the beginning of its next turn.

If any ally makes an attack and misses the ascended intelligence may trigger the program, allowing the ally to immediately reroll and keep the better result. After this the solution program is considered spent, regardless of the result.

That Which Lurks Within – *Requires mech. apt. 6*
Using this talent, the ascended intelligence creates a trap program on a specific object or person with a wireless connection. Example triggers might be: any attempt to 'turn on this computer' or 'attack that player'.

When the talent is triggered, the ascended intelligence makes a roll versus the triggering character's IC defence. The power is spent regardless of the result, but on success, a terror from the triggering character's own nightmares arises between them and their intended target, causing them to abort the action and forfeit the rest of their turn.

Confidence Barrier – *Requires integrity 4*
This talent shields up to ten points of LNS already claimed by the ascended intelligence in question from being claimed by another during the following round. LNS used to create a *confidence barrier* may not be shielded by itself or any other barrier.

Walls of Divine Fire – *Requires Intelligence 9*
All characters within range of the ascended intelligence's manifestation may, at the AI's discretion, receive special adaptive defences. These defences prevent other AIs from using spare LNS to brute force skill checks against them.

Provided the characters are not resisting, the ascended intelligence need not roll to use this talent. Once it has been implemented, the firewalls remain in place until the ascended intelligence elects to remove them, even if the characters move out of the AI's range.

It should be noted that anyone who has one of the ascended intelligence's firewalls forfeits their IC defence versus future attacks by that ascended intelligence (though they may still *resist*). An unwanted (and only an unwanted) firewall can be destroyed as any program using talents such as *decompile*.

Into Oblivion – *Requires Agility 3*
When reduced to one wound the ascended intelligence may shatter their consciousness, creating the appearance of death. This creates four secondary

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manifestations on wireless artefacts that held significance in their life.

If someone can reunite those four secondary manifestations, they will become a single primary manifestation. Until that happens, the ascended intelligence will be unable to make contact with any of their manifestations.

Coil of Mortality – *Requires intelligence 12*
Coil of Mortality allows one ascended intelligence to pull the greater mass of another out of planar space and tether it into mortal bodies where it can be destroyed permanently.

For this talent to work, the primary manifestation of the target AI must be present, and there must be heroic characters (i.e., those with wounds points) into which it can be forced. Each wound point the target AI possesses is one additional heroic character that must be present.

The attacker must beat the target's IC defence. If the attacking AI tries to tether the target into unwilling characters, and those characters aren't servants of the target, it must also defeat those characters' IC defences.

While any amount of it is trapped in mortal form, an ascended intelligence cannot travel, but it may still access its wireless powers – though it suffers a d4 disadvantage to its LNS claim rolls for every wound point trapped. Furthermore, the characters the target AI inhabits are now considered under its total domination and are immune to all effects an AI is normally immune to. Critically however, each time a character with an AI wound point trapped within it is killed, the AI itself loses a wound point.

Note that if a trapped ascended intelligence starts its turn after its trapped wounds have been 'killed', but it has other wounds points remaining, it is now free to act (or retreat to a secondary manifestation) as normal.

Hunger Unending – *Requires Willpower 12*
If an opposing AI has been reduced to its last wound point, an attacking ascended intelligence using this talent may roll one last time versus its IC score to consume it. When one AI consumes another, it may choose to either 1) gain a level or 2) attempt to increase all of its attributes, skills, and abilities. If it chooses this latter option, all its attributes, skills, and abilities are compared to that of its prey and the higher of the two scores in each case comes into effect.

DOCTOR FUMIKO ORIKASA – EXAMPLE ASCENDED

Depending on your campaign, Orikasa could be just as much a focus as the Whisper. For humanity at least, she was responsible for the Whisper, and she is determined to stop it. Heroes collecting the fragments might assume they're assembling a weapon, when in fact they're assembling a critical ally.

The sound on the wireless is as clinical and ordered as the Whisper is chaotic and imperceptible. It is not comforting, exactly, but it provides a kind of relief from the gnashing of the Whisper that has accompanied you since the Shatter.

At the epicentre is a woman, or at least the augmented reality ghost of one. She has obvious Japanese ancestry and a lab coat that drifts about her on some imagined breeze.

Orikasa's self-belief is unrivaled. She knows that she is fallible, but she believes that if she continues to apply herself successes will always overcome failures.

It is not guilt that drives her, so much as a sense of responsibility. She is unsure whether society will ever forgive her for unleashing the Whisper, but right now she believes she is the only one who can stop what she set loose.

What happens to her and Sora after that has not entered her mind. For now she wants to take advantage of the fact that the Whisper thinks she's dead to do as much damage as possible before the final confrontation.

Favoured Virtue: Academic

Favoured Vice: Vanity

Background
Fumiko Orikasa was born in 2101 to a fairly average middle-class family on Hansei. Her father was a mediocre engineer, her mother an office manager, both tended to do contract work that left the family in cycles of wealth and scarcity.

As an only child her parents expected much of her and she worked hard to please them. By the time she finished high school she'd shown an interest in both microengineering and neurology. Her parents paid for her enrollment at ATU where she found her way into the experimental cybernetics program and had the opportunity to learn from Mori Ogawa himself.

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By 2132 she had a doctorate in neurology and was headhunted out of university by Tencom. After making a number of pivotal neural security improvements to the commercial DNIs she went on to be instrumental in the 2134 release of DNI-controlled vehicles. The project formed the basis of her microelectronics masters which she completed in 2135.

When the Pure Research Division put her in charge of Project WSP-3R she was well on the way to turning that into her second doctorate.

For the first time this project forced her to work extensively with people outside the academic and engineering circles. Asur was in every way exotic compared to the string of abortive romances that had punctuated her professional life. His genuine love for the possibilities of cybernetics resonated with her own deep beliefs that humanity was on the cusp of immortality. That he was an Averyn and she was not led to some questions about the future of their relationship, but neither were really looking to settle down and start a family.

Past this point Orikasa's background becomes the background of the Whisper which is covered at the beginning of this book.

Dr. Orikasa Ascended - Stats

Movement: Instantaneous

Skills: Basic +3, Unskilled +5

Skilled (+11) in *resist, computer use, civilised lore, engineering*

AI TRAITS

Integrity 0	Veracity 8	Agility 6
	IC 21	

Wounds Tolerance: 3

Tactics and Gear

Orikasa's goal is to use *Coil of Mortality* on other AIs as quickly as possible and let allies finish them off. Since she knows the Whisper outmatches her in capability she'll tend to focus on defending her LNS, and that of her allies, to buy time.

TALENTS

A Masterful play

LNS Cost 2

A character of the AI's choice may immediately move up to its speed as an incidental action. No computer use roll is required for this talent.

Bold but irrelevant

LNS Cost 3

The ascended intelligence selects a program it has not created and destroys it immediately. If said program has wounds tolerance it loses a wound point.

Will That Cannot be Defied

LNS Cost 10

The ascended intelligence seizes control of a target; when the target comes up in the turn order the ascended intelligence may choose how they behave. This can be used on heroic characters even if they have wounds tolerance remaining.

If this talent is sustained, heroic characters may spend a simple action to make a *resist* check opposed by the AI's *computer use* to break the effect.

Guidance Echo

LNS Cost 2

Using this talent, the ascended intelligence creates a targeting solution program that is in place until the beginning of its next turn.

If any ally makes an attack and misses the ascended intelligence may trigger the program, allowing the ally to immediately reroll and keep the better result. After this the solution program is considered spent, regardless of the result.

Confidence Barrier

LNS Cost 5

This talent shields up to ten points of LNS already claimed by the ascended intelligence in question from being claimed by another during the following round. LNS used to create a *confidence barrier* may not be shielded by itself or any other barrier.

Walls of Divine Fire

LNS Cost 5

All characters within range of the ascended intelligence's manifestation may, at the AI's discretion, receive special adaptive defences. These defences prevent other AIs from using spare LNS to brute force skill checks against them.

Provided the characters are not resisting, the ascended intelligence need not roll to use this talent. Once it has been implemented, the firewalls remain in place until the ascended intelligence elects to remove them, even if the characters move out of the AI's range.

It should be noted that anyone who has one of the ascended intelligence's firewalls forfeits their IC defence versus future attacks by that ascended intelligence (though they may still resist). An unwanted (and only an unwanted) firewall can be destroyed as any program using talents such as decompile.

continue over

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Into Oblivion

LNS Cost 0

When reduced to one wound the ascended intelligence may shatter their consciousness, creating the appearance of death. This creates four secondary manifestations on wireless artefacts that held significance in their life.

If someone can reunite those four secondary manifestations, they will become a single primary manifestation. Until that happens, the ascended intelligence will be unable to make contact with any of their manifestations.

Coil of Mortality

LNS Cost 10

Coil of Mortality allows one ascended intelligence to pull the greater mass of another out of planar space and tether it into mortal bodies where it can be destroyed permanently.

For this talent to work, the primary manifestation of the target AI must be present, and there must be heroic characters (i.e., those with wounds points) into which it can be forced. Each wound point the target AI possesses is one additional heroic character that must be present.

The attacker must beat the target's IC defence. If the attacking AI tries to tether the target into unwilling characters, and those characters aren't servants of the target, it must also defeat those characters' IC defences.

While any amount of it is trapped in mortal form, an ascended intelligence cannot travel, but it may still access its wireless powers – though it suffers a d4 disadvantage to its LNS claim rolls for every wound point trapped. Furthermore, the characters the target AI inhabits are now considered under its total domination and are immune to all effects an AI is normally immune to. Critically however, each time a character with an AI wound point trapped within it is killed, the AI itself loses a wound point.

Note that if a trapped ascended intelligence starts it turn after its trapped wounds have been 'killed', but it has other wounds points remaining, it is now free to act (or retreat to a secondary manifestation) as normal.

The Whisper as an AI Template

As ascended, the three aspects of the Whisper should, technically conform to the rules of the preceeding template.

In practice it'll probably be a long time before any of your players see the template (if at all). During that time encounters with the Whisper should be optimised for narrative strength and the last thing you should be doing is worrying about local network strength and whether the Whisper has enough agility to do all the things it has to do. Such hesitation slows play and undermines the players sense of the Whisper as an entity of unrivaled power.

If a player does ascend, that's when you need to make good on the borderless principles. Think back on everything the Whisper has done and adjust, or add to, the templates for the AI talent to ensure the same things are possible. What's critical is that, given suffiecent LNS, traits and levels, a player ascended should be able to do anything a Whisper aspect can do. Certainly not right away, but if a player wants to become the next Whisper, you should ensure the template allows it.

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APPENDIX II
ALTERNATIVE RULES

Past a certain point, most game systems become a compromise between 'game' and 'simulation'. This is especially true in tabletop games where there is no computer that will handle complex rules. Everything must be done and understood by the people at the tables.

We feel we've struck an excellent balance between complexity and simulation, but this is not a question that has one answer for all groups. For that reason, we've included some alternative rules that you may wish to include in your game.

ALTERNATIVE NATURAL 20S AND NATURAL 1S

Having a natural 20 always succeed tremendously, and a natural 1 always dismally fail, makes the dice game component of *Wireless Soul Transmission* more exciting, but there are circumstances where it becomes unrealistic. If the players can *only* achieve something by rolling the maximum result, then oddly the only possible success is brilliant success. Failure, or natural 20 magnificence.

As an alternative consider adding conformation rolls where success was only possible because of a natural 20. The result of the original roll still indicates at least basic success, but the confirmation roll determines the magnitude of success.

This confirmation roll should be a *luck* [10] check. Where a natural 20 has additional mechanical effects (e.g., maximum damage on an attack) require a 20 on both rolls. You should also use the confirmation roll when describing the action – if it's an 18 then the players *did* succeed brilliantly, if it is only a 3 then they just got lucky.

Let the inverse be true for natural 1s. A skilled character who could *only* fail on a 1 deserves a confirmation roll. If the confirmation roll is low, then they really *did* screw up, but if it's high, it's fair to say all possible luck turned against an otherwise skilled character.

ALTERNATIVE 'TRAINING' FOR ADVANCED SKILLS

Under the current rules a character can pour a full level up worth of advancement points into a skill, potentially going from completely inept to master level between one session and another.

If you want a skill system that is less 'game' and closer to simulation, consider the below:

- Characters may only purchase a maximum of 5 ranks in advanced skills each level.
- A character may only put at most 3 ranks into a specific skill per level up.

ALTERNATE TRAIT ASSIGNMENT SYSTEMS

Any system for assigning physical traits is acceptable so long as all of the players use the same approach. The only tripping point here is charisma which, for game mechanic reasons, can't start lower than 5.

Here's our take on some of the most common alternatives:

Points Distribution
Charisma starts at 5, all other stats are 0. Players have 10 points to add to physical traits as they see fit (without violating the racial maximum).

Exponential Points Distribution
Charisma starts at 6 and may not be changed.

The players have 25 'trait credits' to purchase physical trait scores via the table below. These scores can be assigned to any trait except Charisma, provided they don't violate the racial maximums:

PHYSICAL TRAIT COSTS

SCORE	COST
6	21
5	15
4	10
3	6
2	3
1	1
0	0

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Standard Array
Charisma starts at 6.

The players may assign the following values to the other stats as they choose: 6, 2, 2, 1, 1, 0.

CONTINUOUS ACCELERATION FOR STARSHIPS

For simplicity's sake, it's easier to assume that starships accelerate to a cruise velocity relative to the nearest celestial body and then coast along unless manoeuvres are required. Even the 'almost limitless reaction mass and abundant power' of modern starships has a limit and a couple of hundred kilometres per second is far more velocity than is needed for most orbital activity.

However, if your group wants to play a scientifically accurate game, and do the math, we won't stop you. For these purposes assume that most ships are capable of 20Gs of acceleration with about 24 hours of burn time at full acceleration. For reference, this means a ship can hover in atmosphere for 480 hours assuming linear performance and fuel efficiency.

Unless your group really like maths, it is best to assume linear engine performance and fuel efficiency. We'd recommend you also assume that fuel represents a negligible element of ship's mass (even though this raises the question of 'why not just have more fuel')

This does substantially change the feasibility of solar system journeys (you could reach Mars in under 8 hours, provided someone was there to refuel you) but interstellar journeys remain infeasible (Proxima Centauri is still 150 years away).

MATHEMATICAL CLOSEST PLANAR SPACE APPROACH

Given we've already recommended you keep space travel simple, we'll assume that, if you're reading this, your group is big into maths. To get a 'technical' close approach, you need a rearrangement of the gravity equation:

$$r = F / \text{sqrt}(G \times M1 \times M2 / F)$$

If that equation made you experience blind terror, then this rule isn't for you, so skip on.

If you're still reading, then you know that this equation needs the Newtons of force that gravity is levering on the respective bodies. For our purposes, any time a ship (M2) is close enough (r) that it experiences over 115,000 Newtons of force, it can't enter planar space. If it's already in planar space, it hits a gravity well with the dangerous consequences mentioned previously.

This book doesn't provide starship masses, but we like to think of a full-scale war cruiser as massing similar to the Nimitz class aircraft carrier while a basic light craft would mass closer to the space shuttle.

While the simplified rules provided earlier assume any planet can be approached, this is often not true. Stars are massive, and their gravity well will frequently make it impossible to approach innermost worlds. If your players jump into a system that you haven't done the math for, it's probably best to assume the Titus-Bode law is 'accurate enough' for inner planet formation. On that basis, the player's can reach the second closest world and out, regardless of the stellar mass.

For uncalculated planetary approaches, the below table should give a starting point. For reference, a light craft can jump in at 4% of the capital ship's distance.

SIZE (FACTOR OF EARTHS SIZE)	MINIMUM CAPITAL SHIP ARRIVAL DISTANCE (KM)	% OF LUNAR DISTANCE	TRANSIT TIME TO SURFACE (MINUTES)
Mars (0.1)	59,943	15.6%	5
Small (0.5)	134,037	34.9%	11
Earth (1)	189,557	49.3%	15
Large Earth (2)	268,074	69.7%	21
Super Earth (7.5)	519,124	135%	39
Jupiter (317)	3,379,228	879.1%	276

MELEE SHURIKENS

As a ranged weapon shuriken use the *snapshot/aim/recoil* mechanic for attacking. Most characters who wish to use shuriken are going to focus fairly strongly on agility so most attacks with shuriken will be *snapshots*.

The exception to this is the capacity to throw a barrage of shuriken which, as covered in the autofire rules, uses *recoil*. This might feel wrong in some cases, a huge bulky augmented might be able to throw large volumes of shuriken with more accuracy than an agile ninja could.

The alternative rule for this is simple – make all attacks from shuriken use the melee attack type. Before choosing to use the alternative rule please consider the below:

The reason *melee*, *snapshot*, *aim* and *recoil* are different skills, is because the physics of those three activities are quite distinct. 20/20 vision and the ability to control your breathing in a combat situation might

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make you an excellent sniper, but those skills aren't transferable to using a bucking support machinegun to suppress a horde of berserkers.

As a *skill recoil* isn't just about the ability to control the weapon, but specifically the ability to control a *volume of shots* and spread them across several intended targets. In this respect *recoil* is the obvious (and only) skill for making attacks with numerous shuriken. No other skill includes training for engaging multiple foes with a single attack.

This returns us to the original problem of *recoil* being governed by build. Most uses of *recoil* will relate to firearms, and this is why build was chosen for the governing physical trait. Shuriken are an exception to the link between governing trait and skill, but exceptions like this will come up occasionally with all skills. If a character is trying to jump a very long distance should acrobatics be based on build? If *intuition (people)* is used on a sentient computer system should it be based on mechanical aptitude?

Do we use *athletics* instead of *acrobatics* to jump the chasm because its build based? Do we use *engineering* instead of *intuition (people)* to sense the computers motive because its mech. apt. based?

By itself each of these exceptions might seem fine, preferable even, but this could be a very contentious issue amongst your players. The party's expert acrobat might object to the fact that a character with two ranks in athletics has a better shot at a long jump than they do.

At its core Wireless Soul Transmission assumes that the skill used should be based on the training and abilities that skill implies, *not* on the physical trait which in turn governs that skill. Certainly, you can break this expectation but be mindful you should replace it with something else. Your players should be able to accurately predict what sort of skill check will apply in most cases, and to do this there needs to be core assumptions underpinning your choices.

So by all means implement melee shuriken, but understand what you're getting into. Perhaps treat this like a pass under duress and establish that shuriken, and shuriken only, will get to use a separate skill to facilitate a particular character and only because its core to their concept.

MORE REALISTIC GRAVITY RULES

Gravity has such a drastic impact on our actions that the effects of a significant change are extremely wide-reaching. To provide anything like an accurate simulation, you would need to handle each action case by case. Should you wish to do so, we hope the following guidelines will help:

- Instead of receiving advantage for manual tasks, a character operating in low gravity should suffer 1d6 disadvantage to *almost all* checks. Human beings learn to operate in 1 g through thousands of repetitions of basic tasks (this is why children seem to have such poor hand–eye coordination). Something as simple as lifting a box becomes complicated because we instinctively misjudge the counterforce necessary, easily over balancing.
- Some things ARE easier, so long as you don't have to be precise. Jumping a chasm is easier, since it's a simple matter of distance; jumping onto a rocky spire in the middle of a pit would be harder, since you're very likely to overshoot. In general, anything involving a ballistic trajectory to hit a definite point becomes exceedingly difficult.
- Most of the above applies to zero gravity as well, but worse. Whenever we apply force in zero-g, we have to find an outlet for the counter force. At 1 g we can undo a screw one-handed because gravity is adhering us to the ground with over 500 newtons of counter-force. At zero-g nothing is holding us in place so if you apply 500 newtons per second of rotational force to the screw, only 250 newtons will actually be driven into the screw, the other half is going to start you spinning in the opposite direction at an ever-faster rate.
- Rotational motion in zero-g is a huge problem: If you fire a weapon at zero-g the same way you would at 1 g, you will find yourself somersaulting backwards in place. Assuming the presence of an atmosphere, you will eventually slow to a halt, but if you're also in vacuum, you'd best hope you're drifting towards a wall or have a helpful friend to put a stop to your otherwise infinite rotations.

  With training and proper equipment, you can learn to handle shooting, and many other tasks, safely. But the problem immediately emerges again as soon as you're hit by a projectile. Without some sort of thruster or reaction wheel, there really is no finessing a way out of this problem, which is one of the reasons for the abstract rules. A battle where all the combatants end up spinning in place is only funny until the adventure ends with all the heroes' oxygen running out.
- Weightless isn't the same as mass-less: In zero-g you can apply force over time to gradually impart momentum on something you could never move at 1 g. Given time, and something to press against, you could conceivably get a one-ton weight moving at several centimetres per second. The catch is, if a one-ton weight is coming towards you at a metre

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per second, you might be able to slow it a fraction but mostly it's going to mash you into jam on the wall behind you.

MORE REALISTIC VACUUM RULES.

A hardcore simulation of the effects of exposure to vacuum is not recommended. The first thing that happens to animals that are suddenly exposed to vacuum is the evacuation of all liquids and gases via every available orifice. Both the event and subsequent clean up won't make for very heroic storytelling.

Besides this effect, you can simulate vacuum exposure with the following mechanical effects:

- Characters must make an *endurance* [25] check at the end of each round or fall unconscious.
- Characters who remain conscious must make a separate *endurance* [25] check at the end of each round or be blinded as the irises deform and tears boil off. The blindness lasts until the character has a chance to regroup in a pressurised environment.
- If decompression was rapid (like being sucked out an airlock without warning) a character will suffer an immediate pulverising wound to the lungs as the air within expands. A character with remaining wounds tolerance may reduce the injury to a shattered wound (but not a fractured one).
- Every thirty seconds (5 rounds) the unfortunate character suffers a single wound as per the *choking* rules.

THE TYRANNY OF DIAGONALS

If you measure a square tile diagonally it is longer (by about 41%) than it is tall or broad. Over the years Game Masters have dealt with this in many ways, up to and including the outright banning of diagonal movement. Here a few alternatives you can use.

- Every second diagonal movement counts as 2 tiles – *pros: math-lite; cons: slightly overcorrects*
- Use a hex grid – *pros: just treat it like a normal grid, cons: difficult to draw indoor maps on, weird zigzag movement on certain axis.*
- Allow diagonal moves except on corners – *pros: sort of makes sense, cons: doesn't really balance the issue on open maps*

TRAINING NEW CLASS SKILLS

We encourage most GMs to avoid implementing this alternate rule. While locking classes into specific skill sets may seem 'unnatural', the difference in skills make sure all of the heroes have a part to play.

This rule is best used to acquire a single skill that the party lacks due to its configuration of players and classes.

The alternative rule for Changing class skills works as follows:

- At any level up a character may give up a class skill they have no ranks in and select a new class skill in its place.
- A character may acquire an additional class skill by paying 6 AP.

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APPENDIX III

THE PANIC BOX

The best thing you can do when faced with a grey area around rules is make a call, but we appreciate that this can be hard. If you're a relatively new GM, playing a new system, how are you to divine what is the most fun and fair approach?

For that reason, we've created the panic box.

WHAT FOLLOWS ARE EXAMPLES, NOT RULES

These are questions that came up in testing (or were brainstormed subsequently) and the rulings used at the time.

Take a glance through and consider the approach we've taken. Use the concepts to make your own, on-the-fly calls. Don't try to memorise them, or you'll constantly be flipping back here for rulings that probably have limited consequence.

Of course, if you're not good with systems, you're welcome to apply these rulings directly to your game. Be aware, however, that we can't come close to an exhaustive list. Sooner or later you'll have to make your own call.

GENERAL GAMEPLAY

Can players retroactively perform an action?
We'll often put this to a *preparation* check. This allows us to establish a difficulty representing how probable the retrospective action sounds and then let the dice decide.

Can characters trade with people besides at the settlements and arkets?
Of course. You should still be able to proceed using one of the existing market 'rules'. If the players are looking

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to buy something on the sly from a wireless bar, then it makes sense to use black-market rules. Arcologies generally trade *outside* their walls (the whole point of the arkets), but should the players be buying within an arcology, then using the arket rules should be near enough for game purposes.

Can players get 'expert help' to determine if their black-market purchases are in good working order?
The *spycraft* check is intended to reflect using all resources that are readily available at the time to assess the items. This would include asking more experienced players as well as appraisers available at the marketplace.

However, if the players know an expert who is not readily available, they could absolutely take a black-market item to them. In this case, let the players roll using that character's *engineering* (or whatever skill seems appropriate) versus another +5 roll (or the result of the original roll if you happen to remember it).

CHARACTER CREATION

Can a player record their character details on a non-standard character sheet?
Go for it. Sure, they might cheat a physical trait or forget to fill in a critical detail, but trust us, that will happen with 'official' character sheets anyway.

Can a player play as a different species?
While we aim to flesh out some of the species of the Empire in future books, Wireless Soul Transmission does not provide enough detail to make other species playable.

That said there's no reason an aspiring GM couldn't create some serviceable rules for an alien race that would make it playable. The main detail you'll need is the trait maximums. In general so long as these add up to the same total as humanity, and so long as charisma still caps at 12, you should have a comparable species. Feel free to give that species some interesting talents with an appropriate AP cost.

We would recommend against having more than one or two players playing aliens. The issues raised by Wireless Soul Transmission are a human problem and the alien species would have little reason to find Orikasa's story at all sympathetic and would no doubt oppose the idea of any human ascended.

Can players change the class talents?
Generally, we wouldn't allow a player to change class talents up. The classes are designed to be very powerful in their specific specialty areas. Adjusting their capabilities can result in a character that outstrips the others in multiple areas and is likely to become quite unpopular.

That said, if your whole group finds something very odious or confusing about a particular talent, you should do what you can to fix it.

Can a player customise an origin?
Working with the players to create an origin that resonates with them is strongly encouraged.

Changes that impact mechanical starting bonuses are fine as long as the other players are comfortable with it. We've found that it's best to discuss origins with players in pure story terms, and then the GM alone makes the decision on any mechanical changes.

In our experience, players who are focusing on mechanical changes, rather than story ones, are trying to become the player equivalent of Legolas the Great (see p.3).

- **Safe:**

  A player wants her Ebonsnow ginbushi to be training to become the clan blademaster. The GM suggests changing the starting weapon skills to +3 *melee* and +1 *aim* (instead of the default +2 *melee*, +2 *aim*).

- **Likely to upset other players:**

  A player wants his Pariah network ghost to start with a shoulder-mounted rocket launcher, instead of a light pistol because 'he might have found it'.

  Try not to be directly oppositional to your players' origin concepts (even if they seem grounded in becoming an unstoppable powerhouse). Seek to understand what they're trying to achieve and push things as far as you're comfortable in that direction for them.

  Many players will often want to start at the end (e.g., 'my character *is* the clan blademaster'). Reminding them that the game is about the journey to reach that point can help ground their expectations.

Can a player take two virtues (or two vices) instead of one of each?
No mechanical issue here, but it's worth discussing with the player why their character is such a paragon

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(or otherwise). Well-rounded character personalities should be encouraged, but not enforced.

Don't forget that 'Social Beings' can be purchased with their starting AP to give them an extra virtue or vice and this might accomplish what they're after.

CLASSES (ALL)

With 'Fitness', is it possible to put both the 2 point and the 1 point into the same trait?
We wouldn't allow this as it would defeat the point of the mechanic.

What if a player who takes 'Fitness' has only one physical trait that can still be increased?
Let them increase that trait by 2 (or 1 as their allowable maximums allow) and then record the 'spare' point or points elsewhere for use later.

Do you still get the benefits of 'Honing Defence' once you've left the first ability tier?
Yes. Every level-up grants + 1 *evade* and +1 *cover*. When first entering a new tier, most classes will also get an additional +1 to one of the defences.

AUGMENTED

Can *mechanical lockgrip* be used to strangle?
Yes. We would require a *melee* check to achieve the initial 'grab around neck'. On her turn the victim may attempt to escape by rolling opposed *force* (and the augmented will be assumed to roll maximum). The victim would suffer *choking* damage at the end of their turn.

Survivors may have nightmares of being throttled by cyborgs.

Does *bracing* provide any bonus against being pushed/knocked down?
We don't see why not. We'd give 1d6 advantage if the circumstance seemed to warrant it

Can *rend apart* be used to tear a person in half?
Seems reasonable (if a little brutal). *Melee* check to grab the guy and then *force* efforting checks until something gives. We'd set the difficulty to rip a normal humanoid in half at about 30 (achievable in one roll if you have +12 *force*, but not too likely)

Characters with a wounds tolerance would suffer a fracturing injury each round over the 30 plateau (hit location would be to the guts as this is the logical fail point). Once the wounds tolerance runs out the effect is a given.

If I'm dual wielding melee weapons can I use *trigger mashing* to get the attack from the off-hand weapon?
The talent name certainly doesn't suggest it includes melee weapons, but we'd probably allow it, it's a good treat for minmaxer players who like to find ways to make obscure builds viable.

If you wanted a more moderate interpretation you could rule that at least one of the weapons must be ranged.

Is *lock on* usable with any weapon, or just with the smart-linked Weapon?
The intention is that the talent only be used with the smart weapon.

If a character has multiple smart weapons, we see no reason they couldn't consider them both 'Locked On'. There's also no hard and fast rule saying a character can't smart link all of their weapons to one augment.

Can *mental reset* or *autopilot failsafe* recover from an EMP?
Depends how desperate the players are. In many circumstances, we wouldn't allow it, since those abilities are about software, while EMP has a hardware component.

That said, if the party's survival depends on the interpretation, we'd probably allow it as a pass under duress.

Do the additional hit location/damages stack between *double tap* and a shotgun?
Yep, though most things won't need that much firepower. At medium range a shotgun would get 6 hit locations. Damage would be rolled twice, once for the first set of 3 and once for the second.

Would the Budo Skull augmentation stack with defensive blades?
We certainly think so, but it's important to note that these two do slightly different things. Defensive blades are *only* defensive and only against melee attacks, while the Budo augmentation provides exactly the same benefits as heijoshin.

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DISCONNECTED

Can _____ talent affect a disconnected?
Anything that uses wireless communication, for better or for worse, doesn't impact the disconnected in any way. As a general guide, if a talent rolls against IC defence, then the disconnected is immune.

Can a disconnected really shoot through the guardian's *wall program*? Could a system guardian erect a wall all the way around a disconnected, making him an invulnerable turret?
Yes, though we recommend you let your players discover this awesome trick on their own. If the players start to constantly fall back on the 'unbroken wall around the disconnected' tactic, just warn them that the Whisper is starting to adapt to their trick.

From next session onward, give your Whisper creatures the ability to 'see' through 90° corners in wall programs. This still allows the tactic but reduces the number of applications.

If a character was already stationary when asked to make a *stealth* roll, can *I don't think it saw us* still be used?
Yes. They stay *extra* still.

Can *innovation* be used to improve weapon skills?
If the player can come up with an innovative way to do it.

Can 'Specialised' be used to improve weapon skills?
No. This one is for advanced skills only.

If I'm dual wielding melee weapons can I use *trigger mashing* to get the attack from the off-hand weapon?
The talent name certainly doesn't suggest it includes melee weapons, but we'd probably allow it, it's a good treat for minmaxer players who like to find ways to make obscure builds viable.

If you wanted a more moderate interpretation you could rule that at least one of the weapons must be ranged.

If a player suffers multiple injuries from a single attack (caught in a blast, shotgun, etc.) and they use *will to live*, do they need to spend a feat of will for each injury or just one for the whole attack?
Strictly it's one of each injury. If it's an epic moment, and they've only got the one feat of will left, you might let it pass under duress.

GINBUSHI

Is there a mechanical reason the Yuki-onna can't use the nano-forged katana yet, or is it strictly a character reason?
Have a look at the sidebar after the nano-forged katana entry in the equipment section of this book (p.202). At low levels, there's no reason attempting to perform this ritual shouldn't be fatal. As a rule if you (the GM) don't know enough about a character to create a compelling ritual, then they don't know enough about themselves to survive one.

We'd add that if a player is pushy about it, they might be playing the wrong origin. The main reason they won't use that sword should be that they *wouldn't*, not that they can't.

For *chugi mastery* what constitutes 'completely destroyed'?
The simplest way is to just burn the body, but as a GM, it would be a cruel move to have your opponents burning every corpse they see just in case. This is really meant to be one of those legendary 'only one is able to master in a century' kind of abilities, so the enemy shouldn't be really prepared for it the first time it happens.

With that in mind, the player is more likely to die by falling into lava or acid than by actually being slain.

Can *heijoshin mastery*, *makoto mastery* and *rei mastery* all be combined?
Yes, though a player would have to invest a lot of advancement points to achieve that configuration.

In this case, in response to any attack against the ginbushi, the player may make one *melee* attack using the Weak-Point Hit Location Table and one *melee* or *snapshot* attack using the normal hit location rules.

Should others know if a character has activated *heijoshin mastery*?
GM-controlled characters shouldn't recognise it unless they possess the talent themselves. Normal opponents should pick their targets as though ignorant of the talent.

If a non-player character uses the talent, you should give a description cue (your foe closes his eyes for a moment and takes on a meditative expression). The players should quickly figure out what that means for future reference.

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Does having heijoshin mastery mean you can ignore someone else using the same?
Yes, but you also have to spend the feat of will. Also, remember that the ability to ignore an equal or lower level of *heijoshin* only applies to *melee* attacks.

Could a character still use *heijoshin* while carrying someone/immobilised/encumbered?
Heijoshin requires both speed and economy of motion. If a ginbushi's legs are trapped and a bullet comes at their face, it's not unreasonable to assume they might still dodge it.

On the other hand, if they're carrying a bag of anvils and need to dodge a bus that's about to run them down, it fair that they need to drop the anvils as part of the evasion.

How exactly does *yu* allow a melee weapon to engage opponents two to four metres away?
Assume the ginbushi is leaping forward to make the attacks and then stepping back to her original position.

You can actually make your fights a little more dynamic by having the ginbushi move to an adjacent square as part of the attack (and then remain there unless she makes more attacks). Just remember this, by itself, wouldn't count as a dash or long dash.

Can a trio of *heijoshin I* users work together to treat their combined talents as *heijoshin III* for the purposes of attacking a single high-level ginbushi?
It's not really the intention of the rules. As in action movies, the 'master samurai' should be able to take on an awful lot of weaker opponents, not just a couple.

That said, if you wanted a more realistic model for one-versus-many fighting, you could certainly rule that *heijoshin* stacks. You could also make it a special talent (*networked heijoshin*) that the Whisper evolves if the players go headhunting ronin aspirants.

NETWORK GHOST

If a heroic character suffers a point of mental trauma in place of the effects of a wireless attack, are they then aware that they're under mental assault?
We'd say this depends on the circumstances. The character would be aware that they have suddenly got a brutal headache, whether they would attribute this to a wireless assault is likely to be influenced by whose company they're in.

This is probably also a great opportunity for some dynamic dice reading. If the wireless attack roll only *just* made it then maybe they do something that gives away to the victim that this was more than just a spontaneous migraine.

For *six second lie*, what constitutes as 'believable fiction'?
Obviously, it's your call, and it's a sliding scale. If the player shows up at a gate and makes the guard believe he showed a valid security pass, that's a believable fiction, after all, it's why people go to the gate guard.

On the other hand, if it's a gate to a corporate arcology and the player is heavily augmented, you're in your rights to say it's dubious enough to allow a check. If it's unusual enough that someone might remark on it later (can you believe that aug got a pass?), then it needs to beat the IC defence.

What constitutes a 'plausible threat' for *IFF failure*?
This is really about making sure the attack is transferred to another combatant. Random bystanders do not constitute threats and nor do characters fleeing a battle. Pretty much everything else is fair game.

What's the difference between *machinesia* and *active cloak*?
Machinesia lasts longer but only affects recordings, while *active cloak* affects perception in real-time. A motion-activated autogun would still see and shoot a machinesia user, but would later retain no record of having done so. By contrast the active cloak user would not be detected passing by the weapon at all.

Machinesia also has no effect on living beings (even augmented ones). On the other hand *active cloak* will affect anyone with a DNI.

For *mental static*, do you roll the 1d6 disadvantage on each roll or just once and apply the result universally?
So long as it won't slow play down too much, it's generally better to roll the 1d6 with every roll. It keeps the penalty fresh in people's minds and helps avoid a single unlucky roll making the talent almost pointless.

For ambient control, does the *computer use/defeat security* check to manipulate a secure device count as an additional complex action?
In most cases it should just be an incidental action – it's a tier-four ability, so you want the character to be moving through the facility like he owns the place.

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For secure databases, we'd still require some amount of time spent on the check as the user needs time to find what they're looking for.

Can someone recover from the effects of *dominate*?
If the players use this talent on an opponent, it would be pretty inappropriate to surprise them with 'he got better'.

On the other hand, if a player ally gets hit by the talent, it could make for an interesting story arc. Perhaps the player gets better on their own, perhaps the heroes recover a brain scan of the original individual and their own network ghost can use the same talent to repair the damage.

If you have *shared hallucination* and *inception*, can you rewrite memories for multiple characters at once?
Absolutely.

If you have *shared hallucination* and *inception*, can you rewrite memories for periods longer than six seconds?
Absolutely. Strictly you don't need shared hallucination to do it either, since *inception* lets you alter more distant memories.

Assuming frequent access to a subject, a bold network ghost could change a few seconds every day until a subject's memory of an entire hour had been replaced (assuming four feats of will this would take 150 days, so you'd have to really want it).

What happens if *inception* makes a subject's memory no longer line up?
Most often it just means the victim is confused when they try to recall events. Memory is imperfect even without people hacking your brain. A character who remembers taking a train ride, but has no memory of getting on the train, probably won't consider the shift remarkable at all.

Where memories are both important and directly contradictory, a character may seek external validation of their memory. Not because they believe they've been hacked, but because the uncertainty demands clarification. Suppose a character has a memory of both locking a safe and of leaving it unlocked, they would likely be compelled to check on the safe.

Also keep in mind we aren't constantly recalling all of our memory, all of the time. A character isn't going to notice a 'seam' unless they have reason to recall of chain of events passing over that seam.

SYSTEM GUARDIAN

Can a disconnected really shoot through the guardian's *wall program*? Could a system guardian erect a wall all the way around a disconnected, making him an invulnerable turret?
Yes, though we recommend you let your players discover this awesome trick on their own. If the players start to constantly fall back on the 'unbroken wall around the disconnected' tactic, just warn them that the Whisper is starting to adapt to their trick.

From next session onward, give your Whisper creatures the ability to 'see' through 90° corners in wall programs. This still allows the tactic but reduces the number of applications.

Could a character accidentally shoot through a guardian *wall*?
Technically yes. The wall has no actual physical component, the inability to shoot through it is a compulsion, not a physical constraint.

That said, the compulsion also prevents attempts to intentionally engineer an accident, or to attack the wall itself.

Can *coverfire* really retaliate against an unlimited number of foes?
For practical purposes, yes. Keeping count is a chore and this is a game.

For impractical purposes (a literal army of opponents is shooting at one player under *coverfire*) we would warn the guardian that he'll only be able to retaliate against the first half dozen shots *before* the person he's covering absorbs the remaining fusillade of pulse rounds and is horribly killed.

Could *decompile* be used to remove the software that opens a door? Or the OS on a computer?
Yes and yes. Just remember that security doors don't 'fail' into the open position, and removing the OS on a computer renders the data unreadable.

Keep an eye out for a system guardian who's trying to dodge making *defeat security* checks by using decompile. If there's another character with *defeat security* in the party, he shouldn't get sidelined because the guardian keeps blasting things open with programs.

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Can a *local lockdown* be used to 'lock up' others' cybernetics?
No. In the same way that a robot's arms can't be locked up, an augmented individual's limb can't be deactivated. Both are subject to direct and constant control.

Does *quarantine* prevent further wireless attacks against the victim as well?
No. This is a tier four ability, hamstringing it with a limitation like that seems inappropriate.

Does *reflection algorithm* affect the Ambient Whisper?
No. The Ambient Whisper is immune to all wireless attacks.

WEAPONS

Can a character pick up an opponent's weapon and use it? Would it use a weapon slot?
Absolutely. If they just want to use it temporarily, there's no need to swap it into a weapon slot.

If they plan on carrying it past multiple encounters, then it should use a weapon slot.

If a weapon is the size of a wallet or smaller can it be counted as a 'minor item' per the equipment rules?
We treat any weapon as always using up a weapon slot. If a character was carrying a tiny weapon specifically to give to someone else, we might make an exception.

With unarmed, if my build suggests an AP higher than my cybernetic arms material, can I still make the attack?
Certainly. If the punch is delivered as the clincher on a climatic fight, we might have the arm/fist shatter as it delivers the killing blow.

In this case we'd make sure that it was repairable, or that a replacement was forthcoming right away. Breaking the cyber limb should add to the drama, not come across as punishment for making a non-standard attack.

Can unarmed be used to disarm/trip/restrain, etc.
Yes, yes and definitely yes. Unarmed combat can be wonderfully dramatic, wrestling over a pistol, kicking someone through a window, and so on. All of this is to be encouraged.

For almost all usages, we'd simply require an opposed *melee* roll. Generally, you can only do one thing, so if a player wants to disarm someone and deal them a damaging punch to the face, they'd have to work across multiple rounds.

Can a character wielding a two-handed weapon make an unarmed attack using a kick or head butt?
Yes. Generally, this would be exclusively for damage rather than trips/disarms etc. Kicking a pistol out of someone's hand is a lot harder than it looks in the movies.

For damage, we'd just use the standard unarmed damage for the character.

Does the kusarigama use two weapon slots?
It does. The two elements of the weapon are so distinct that a character would need to train for both, hence two slots.
If a character wants to use just the chain, or just the sickle, we'd allow it. The chain would still be a two-handed weapon, however.

Could a character throw a grenade into a room without exposing themselves to an attack from within?
Sure, breach teams do this all the time, the door is opened a crack and the grenade is tossed in underarm.

Could a pocket mine be thrown?
Yes. Before your players get too excited about using them as substitute grenades, remind them that the charge doesn't arm until the end of the players' following turn. This gives enemies plenty of time to move away from it.

Can a character take a ready action to fire on a strafing aircraft only once it enters short range (thus avoiding the danger of a Whisper intervention)?
They *can,* but most aircraft will never fly that low (less than 20 metres off the ground would be suicidal in an urban environment).

Shooting down fast-moving aircraft in the post-Whisper world is always a risk. As the GM, it's not necessary to have the Whisper attempt to fox every missile the players fire, just enough that they never feel completely safe using an Artemis.

Are grenades thrown using *aim, snapshot, recoil* or some mix of the three?
We'd allow *aim* or *snapshot*. *Recoil* doesn't make sense, since you can't autofire grenades.

William Kwan (Quiz - 36 18/23)

The chain on the kusari gama is a melee weapon but it attacks at a distance. Should it use melee or snap/aim/recoil?
Despite its reach the physics of attacking with the chain definitely has more in common with a melee weapon than a firearm. We'd use melee.

WEAPON UPGRADES

Can a weapon upgrade be switched to another weapon?
We'd allow this as a complex action. Some things (like polymer construction) would be forever stuck with the weapon they're placed on.

ARMOUR

Can a character put on someone else's origin armour?
If everyone's comfortable with it. This *could* be exploited, since starting armours have no build requirements.

Of course, most starting armours aren't exactly amazing either, so it shouldn't be a big deal in most cases.

Can a character mix and match armour suit components?
Sure, why not? You'd have to find an appropriate build requirement for their new franken-armour.

Assuming they've combined two suits, we'd pick a requirement somewhere in the middle of the two.

EQUIPMENT

What if a player wants to carry three personal items?
Generally, we wouldn't allow this. The purpose of the equipment system is to balance the fact that, in science fiction, many problems can be easily solved with a piece of technology.

By limiting the amount of access any given character has to tech, you prevent one character always having the right gadget to solve the problem. You're also more likely to see players trying to improvise based on what they're carrying.

If a weapon is the size of a wallet or smaller can it be counted as a 'minor item'?
We treat any weapon as always using up a weapon slot. If a character was carrying a tiny a weapon specifically to give to someone else, we might make an exception.

Can a player roll to access items from their home stash as soon as they leave their home base?
There has to be an established need for an item to be summoned. From our perspective 'I need to unlock this door' presents an immediate need, 'we've passed several locked doors' does not.

If a player has multiple instances of an item in their home stash, can they roll multiple times to see if they have it?
No. If they didn't think to bring climbing kit number one, there's no reason to assume they'd have brought climbing kit number two.

That said if they use a consumable (mainly software), or an item breaks they might roll to see if they bought their *second* one as a backup.

My players need to deliver a dozen crates of weapons to a crusader faction, but how would they do this? Home stash? Personal Items? Quest Items?
We think this is better solved as a narrative element than a mechanical one. If the players aren't going to be attacked while in transit, then it makes sense to just narrate that the weapons were delivered.

If they *are* attacked in transit, then you need to decide how the weapons are actually carried. Assuming no Whisper-safe vehicles are available, it seems likely the heroes would tear the wheels off some vehicle to make a wagon. Pulling a wagon of guns through the city by hand isn't very heroic work, but that's the apocalypse for you. We'd love to see a WAC (maybe the Mule variant) pulling the wagon and maybe the players have a side quest to recover such a thing before they can make their delivery.

However, you do it, you want the weapons to be 'on the field' when the players are called on to defend their delivery. This is both more interesting, and more realistic, than 'each player has one crate in their backpack somehow'.

Doesn't the Whisper interfere with communicators?
The Whisper doesn't block all communications, but it does propagate across them (just as it does across DNIs). Augmented individuals have already taught themselves not to listen too close to it, and disconnected (the main users of vanilla com units) can't hear it anyway.

In short, you can hear others, they just need to speak a little louder to be heard over the Whisper. Oh and nobody tries to enhance 'a faint single' anymore because it's almost certainly the Whisper.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

Can a player constantly monitor their hand scanner, or have it sent to their HUD?
We'd put a firm no to this at our table. The device provides such a range of readings and indicators that a dedicated analysis is required to make sense of it. More importantly, it's impossible for the GM to remember every early warning device the players have set up.

There's a guaranteed bad feeling that occurs when the GM describes an ambush and one of the players says, 'but eight sessions ago I said I was always scanning for magnetic anomalies and these guys are in steel armour'.

Are power cells universally compatible?
Generally. Making players track five different kinds of power source is a chore.

If they need to power some ancient alien technology, it might be appropriate to require an *engineering* check to make them compatible.

Can a power cell be recharged?
Sure, why not? Probably needs a couple of hours if attached to any reasonable generator.

Can detcord be used as a weapon?
It would be difficult to do so. Certainly, it could injure; if you could wrap it around someone's waist you could cut them in two. If you could get someone to lie down while you put a ball of it on their chest it would burn through them to the floor underneath. The catch is that most people aren't going to wait calmly while they're rigged with explosives.

Of course, if a player found a suitable way to weaponize detcord, we'd allow it. This might mean creating a new weapon for it and it would use up a weapon slot and (most likely) a munitions token on each shot.

Can a player have proximity detonators for m-grade?
Sure. Because of the size of the blast, there would have to be a significant delay before the proximity fuse armed.
For most uses, we'd allow a player to assume that the necessary equipment is available with the explosives.

What about more esoteric triggers, like wiring it to a vehicle's starter, or setting it to go off when someone's heart stops?
Those all sound pretty awesome to us. We'd probably require an *engineering* (or *medical*) check to make it work out. Wiring to a piece of electronics would be a piece of cake [10], but connecting it to someone's vital functions would be very difficult [25].

Could you manufacture poisons with the contents of a surgery kit, or a trauma kit?
Seems reasonable that knock out poisons would be included in both kits as a matter of course. Emetic poison would be in a surgery kit, and we'd probably allow a *preparation* [10] check to see if it's included in a trauma kit.

With a *medical* [15] check you could probably create a dose of neurotoxin from the contents of a surgery kit.

Other poisons have very specific chemical ingredients that are unlikely to be included among medical equipment.

Do poisons count as incidentals?
There's nothing incidental about a neurotoxin. Each poison is its own item.

If we had a character who wants her whole deal to be poison, we'd allow her to create a 'poison kit' of three poisons that count as a single item. Poisons surplus to this we would treat as individual items.

Can a player character write their own software?
Sure! It's not quick though (as any software engineer can attest). We'd make it a *computer use* efforting check and each roll would require a week of downtime for dedicated work.

We'd probably set the difficulty at 25 for the basic programs in the *Play Guide*. This means a skilled character could very well complete the work in a single week.

Does software count as an incidental?
Not from our perspective. As with weapons, the limitation here reflects the specific knowledge necessary to utilise a given piece of software.

It may surprise you to know that most Trojans are a little more complicated than a single button that says 'seize control'.

William Kwan (Order #36187234)

What's the difference between the bug-out wall and the guardian's *wall program*?
The guardian's wall is smaller, but it blocks line of sight, and it can't be attacked, or attacked *through*, by any augmented being. The guardian can dispel the wall at any time.

The bug-out wall is larger and lasts an unspecified amount of time (call it an hour) but it only stops Whisper agents. Whisper agents can see through it and, more importantly, can attack through it. They'll also actively try to destroy it.

In short, the bug-out wall is great for putting a barrier in the way of a swarm of berserkers while you make good your escape. The guardian's *wall program* is more useful for creating impromptu cover.

How long does it take the Whisper to break down a bug-out wall?
As long as you want it too. If the players are using it to make an escape, then it's probably safe to assume it provides them all the time they need.

On the other hand, if they're holding a bunch of melee opponents at arm's length while they hotwire a vehicle, we'd describe the wall coming down with every round that passes. Perhaps even a few opponents crawl through gaps. Ultimately the wall would come down right as the players are ready to go and they would dive into the vehicle and careen away as the swarm charges in.

Most programs are single use, can a character carry multiple instances and use each instance once?
Yes.

Could a player salvage any aircraft parts out of a set of starship parts (or vehicle parts from aircraft parts)?
We'd probably allow this, though it's not exactly cost effective to get a ¥200,000 part by sacrificing a ¥1,000,000 one.

Could vehicle parts be combined to get aircraft, or starship parts?
We'd probably not allow this. No matter how many vehicles you scavenge, you're not likely to find a high-performance ion engine. If salvage is important to your game an *engineering* [25] check might allow ten vehicle parts to be cobbled together to get a single starship part.

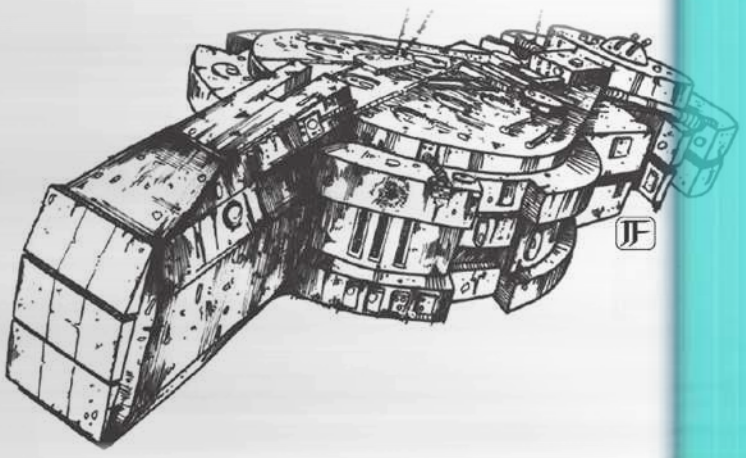
Exactly how late can a NL harness activate?
Human beings can only tolerate 2 or 3 negative Gs. The good news is terminal velocity for a person is only about 54 metres per second, so a NL harness will perform all its deceleration in the last two or three seconds. This deceleration starts at about a hundred metres off the ground.

More simply put 'no, someone on the ground can't just shoot someone while they're descending in a NL harness'.

Just how 'unbreakable' are zip cuffs?
The important thing about any restraint device used by the players is that it's dependable. From the players' perspective, there's no point in a restraint device that leaves them open to having the prisoner 'wriggle out and sneak away while you weren't looking'. If the game system doesn't offer a 'perfect' system for securing prisoners, then the players will just start murdering everyone who surrenders and that will give your game a very dark tone.

That said, while we would allow a zip cuff to restrain any normal human, we'd warn that no off-the-shelf arm restraint is likely to work on a character with two Hercules biceps, or on something massive like a collector.

As with most things, if it's a *player* has been restrained by zip cuffs these rules don't apply. In this instance, we'd allow an *acrobatics* check to dislocate a thumb and slip out, or a *force* check to snap the cuffs. In either case the difficulty is probably 28 (hard enough that only an exceptionally skilled individual could pull it off).



William Kwan (Order #36487234)

CYBERNETICS

If an augmentation is damaged/EMPed/cut off, does the player have to recalculate their max physical traits (and accordingly everything that relates to that)?
Better not to. As you've guessed, this is a lot of work and as long as the player is planning to repair/reattach the limb, you're going to have to undo it all again later.

For now, it's going to be hard enough for the player getting his character around without a limb, probably not necessary to make them do math as well.

What happens if an augmented, a network ghost or a system guardian, permanently removes their DNI?
This is a transformative experience. Not being able to use their cybernetics is the first, most obvious limitation. Their trait maximums would be reset to the racial defaults, and any scores that exceed the new maximums would be reduced until they were 'legal'.

They would retain their skill ranks, but scores made illegal by a reduction in governing trait would be reduced as necessary. All talents that relied on their augmentations, or whose minimum trait requirements were no longer met (which is usually most of them) would be unusable.

Next time they level up, they would take the first level of the disconnected class and gain the disconnected class skills (they could not purchase any more ranks in their old class skills). They would not receive any origin perks and future levels would continue to be taken from the disconnected.

What happens if a ginbushi removes their nanites?
It would be an unlikely circumstance. Nanites are so decentralised that anything that might remove them would likely kill the ginbushi as well. If a targeted surgery was used, however; the process would be the same as the above. They would no longer be able to safely wield a nano-forged katana.

What happens if a disconnected gets augmented?
They are no longer allowed to take levels in the disconnected class. Next level-up they must take a level from the augmented class (or possibly the guardian or ghost if they had a type 2 DNI installed).

In place of their old class skills they gain the class skills for their new class but retain all old skill ranks. They receive no origin benefits from their new class.

Note that this is a pretty transformative experience as well, despite the lesser mechanical impact. As a GM, you should endeavour to avoid 'forcing' augmentation on your disconnected unless they want this transition to occur as part of their character.

The most common way of 'forcing' a transition is dealing a character a maiming wound. Certainly, replacing a lost arm with cybernetics is easier, but if it breaks the character, it might be necessary to look into alternatives. See Cloned Limbs (p.211) as a starting point.

Can the worker's hand augment substitute for an engineer's kit?
Only to the extent that a multi-tool can substitute for a full tool kit in the real world. We'd allow it for most small scale uses, but if the character wants to repair a starship, they're going to need proper equipment.

Does the defensive blades augmentation mean I can ignore a ginbushi's *heijoshin*?
As the name suggests, the defensive blade augmentation is purely defensive. With a pair of defensive blades you certainly could block the first two melee attacks from a ginbushi with *heijoshin I*, but he would still get a free evade against your first attack each round.

Is the distance of the jump for the Dragon Mobility system horizontal or vertical?
Either, but not both. If you wanted to jump on top of something tall and far away, it would probably have to be at most 30 metres away and no more than 30 metres tall (assuming a full round action for the jump).

Are the checks to recover from disease/poison by the Endurance Medical System *instead* of the player's own endurance checks or as well as?
As well as. A character afflicted by a disease could potentially get three checks: Their own endurance check, the check by the augmentation, and a check by an attendant doctor.

Would a U-safe filter work against tear gas?
Technically it shouldn't (or at least it shouldn't provide complete protection), but most players tend to assume it will. Given it's a game, it's better to honour their presumption.

William Kwan (Quiro 36187234)

If you EMP a character with Eternity memory extensions, do they experience amnesia?
The solid-state drives of a EME augment are always shielded. What *isn't* (without purchasing the EMP-shielding upgrade) are the systems that collect that information and share it with the human brain.

Thus, a character *would* experience memory loss, but only until the device was brought back online. Given it's really a character's choice what goes in the memory extensions, it's probably safe to assume nothing mission critical is lost.

As a side note: a character trying to find someone who can repair a damaged EME so they can access forgotten memories might make a cool backstory.

Does the Watchtower AMS only shoot down missiles that were going to *directly* hit the protected target?
Strictly the Watchtower attempts to shoot down any missile as it comes within four squares of the target. This is why it is not effective against building-area blasts – even at that distance, the target is still well within the blast.

The kami yokai is a melee weapon but it can attack at a distance. Should it use melee or *snap/aim/recoil* for its attacks?
Despite its reach the attack has most in common with a melee weapon so we'd use the melee skill.

CYBERNETIC UPGRADES

Can a cybernetic upgrade be transferred to a different augmentation?
The cybernetic upgrades read as pretty integral components, so a field switch is definitely out of the question. We'd allow this during a party rest and it would require an *engineering* [25] check.

SKILLS (ALL)

What happens if two skills both seem like they'd apply?
This will come up all the time, many activities have elements of more than one thing. We select the skill we feel matters *most*. If two skills seem equally relevant, we'll let the player choose.

When is it appropriate to use efforting checks?
The big problem with normal skill checks is time. Suppose a character rolls *engineering* to build a house. For the type of structure she's talking about, you feel a week is a reasonable construction time.

Unfortunately, this means if the character fails, then she effectively spends a whole week accomplishing absolutely nothing.

So, this sort of activity makes more sense in the context of an efforting check. Instead of rolling once for the whole week, the player makes daily rolls toward an efforting check. This means the house can be finished sooner, or later, or even abandoned but left with some idea of the progress that was achieved.

Efforting checks work best for activities under pressure, such as trying to open a security door while the rest of the party hold off a collector or hacking a computer system before its failsafe wipes the drive.

Be careful with efforting checks that have higher difficulties, especially if only one character can work on it at a time. If one character spends an entire encounter chipping away at a 100 difficulty efforting check while her companions are fighting a parade of interesting opponents, she may well feel sidelined.

Efforting checks should be pivotal enough that the whole party is interested in the progress, even if not everyone is assisting.

Instead of using aid another, can both characters just attempt the task?
If they can, they probably should. The Working Together rule is intended for things where a character can provide assistance, but only one can engage in the main attempt.

If one character is piloting an aircraft through a storm, another could take up the co-pilot seat and provide assistance. The pair still only get one shot at navigating the storm, and only one character can attempt to fly it.

Can a player declare that they are providing assistance after another player has rolled and failed?

Generally we allow this. In most applications a skilled individual can see if things are coming apart for another and jump in to help. If you've ever seen someone about to drop a heavy box and grabbed an end then you've aided another after the outcome of the check was determined.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

How fast can a player climb while in combat?
Being shot at while climbing a tall cliff is actually kind of boring (since the players are just fish in a barrel). If it comes to it. we'd let a character climb their speed up or down instead of a normal dash (so they can still use a simple action to shoot back a little). We wouldn't allow 'long dash' moves upwards though.

BASIC SKILLS

How long should a character be performing an action before it becomes an *endurance* check?
Long enough that it shouldn't come up too often. If you're talking about running, then anything over 400 metres is definitely about *endurance* rather than speed.

For other activities, science tells us that human peak physical effort can only be maintained for about thirty to forty seconds. In game terms, this means more than about five rounds of an activity becomes an endurance check.

When should *endurance* be used instead of *resist*?
Endurance is a measure of physical resilience, *resist* is a measure of the mental equivalent.

In a lot of cases, we allow a player to use either. If a character wants to continue fighting despite heinous injuries, they might do so via *endurance* (they're tough enough they don't feel the pain) or *resist* (they feel the pain alright, but they grit their teeth and bull through it).

In other cases, only one makes sense. If a character is being consumed from the inside out by a deadly bio-weapon 'mind over matter' isn't really going to help. On the other hand, if you're trying to seize control of your body back from the Whisper, you'll need discipline, not physical fortitude.

Human build scores are between 1 and 4; that's not a lot considering human weightlifting ranges from thirty kilos to over a hundred. How do I determine how much force to lift something (or push or pull etc.)?
It's important to remember that the dice and skill mechanic *represent* actions, it does not simulate them. For that reason, it's best to use broad strokes and accept that sometimes a build-0 character is able to achieve something incredible because of a good roll.

If you need some specific guidelines, consider the following. You'll note that the scale is somewhat exponential.

FORCE DIFFICULTY EXAMPLES

DIFFICULTY	EXAMPLE (APPROX. LIFT WEIGHT)
5	Lifting a bag of potatoes (5 kg)
10	Forcing an ordinary door (10 kg)
15	Throwing a piece of furniture (desk, 50" plasma TV etc.) (50–100 kg)
20	Smashing through a brick wall (1,000 kg)
25	Lifting a car above your head (1,500 kg)
30	Picking up a car and throwing it at someone (3,500 kg)

Is jumping *athletics* or *acrobatics?*
If the character is leaping between two static points, we'd probably allow either. Both a trained parkour artist and someone who was just really strong have a significant advantage.

For more elaborate jumps – leaping onto a moving vehicle, diving through an open window and so forth – *acrobatics* would be required. One useful guideline is to remember that *acrobatics* is based on agility rather than build. Thus, if the jump requires any sort of finesse, it should be limited to the *acrobatics* skill; if it's just about crude distance or height, either is fine.

How far can a character jump?
Most times, it's better to measure distances in difficulty than in metres. It takes some getting used to, but it's more important to the players to know 'it's pretty broad, it'd take an *acrobatics* [20] check to get across that chasm' than to know exactly how many meters.

Consider the following table, though we strongly recommend you focus more on the examples than the parenthetical distances:

William Kwan (Quiet) 36187234

ACROBATICS DIFFICULTY EXAMPLES

DIFFICULTY	EXAMPLE (DISTANCE)
5	Hop across a small gap (<1 square). Jump onto a couch (0.3 m)
10	Leap across a narrow chasm (1 square). Jump over a yard fence (1 m)
15	Leap between two moving vehicles (2–3 squares) Jump up and grab the rail of a first floor balcony (2 m)
20	Leap from rooftop to rooftop across an alley (4–6 squares) Leap onto the roof of a one-story building (4 m)
25	Jumping from an uncoupled carriage to the train that's leaving it behind (6–8 squares) Leap up and grab a low-hovering LEVV (5–10 m)
30	Leaping between two aircraft flying in formation (6–12 squares) Leaping onto the roof of a three-storey building. (10–15 m)

Does a jump need a run up?
We wouldn't require one, but we'd describe one. That is to say: making a player spend a round 'setting up for the jump' is going to slow the action down and discourage cool, spur of the moment improvisation.

Instead we'd describe the outcome as including a run up, without costing them any extra movement.

Taking a few steps back, you charge at the edge and then leap off, your feet gliding over nothingness for a few terrifying seconds before they find purchase on the opposite rooftop.

When do you use *react* as distinct from *evade* or *snapshot*?
Snapshot is specifically for making ranged attacks. While it can be used at the start of combat to decide who shoots first, it has a very narrow focus.

Evade is a defence, it should only be used when an attack has been made against the character. A player may not choose to employ *react* instead of *evade*.

React covers all remaining circumstance. Suppose the player characters come across a guard (combat hasn't yet begun) and try to shoot him before he can sound the alarm. We would make the player roll *snapshot* and the guard roll *react*, with four possible outcomes.

If the *snapshot* is higher than the *react*, then the shot is fired before the alarm can be sounded. Regardless of whether it comes before, or after, a shot that beats the guard's *evade* defence hits him. Pulling the alarm might be the last thing he ever does.

To keep play moving, we might assume that any shot which beats the *react* roll, also beats the *evade* defence (and vice versa).

When is *resist* used as opposed to an IC defence?
We treat 'IC' as your body's natural defence against wireless attacks, while *resist* is a conscious effort to use discipline to overcome adversity.

We always use IC defence for the original incursion of a wireless attack. The defender may not know they're under attack until their firewalls have already failed (even then) so IC defence comes into play. At this point, having more augments is a distinct disadvantage because it means more 'entry points' for the attacker.

If a wireless attack endures for multiple rounds, we'll generally use *resist* as a means of 'throwing off' the effects on later rounds. In this instance, no one is 'trying to get in' so having more, or less, augments doesn't have an impact. More importantly the character can direct the full force of their will toward the problem since they are fighting a known effect.

How fast can a character swim?
For simplicity, characters may move their normal movement speed in the water. They may use squares of movement to dive or surface as well.

We generally wouldn't allow long dashes for movement in water.

ADVANCED SKILLS

Can a player assist with an efforting check they don't meet the skill check requirements for?
We generally wouldn't allow this. Trained doctors aren't likely to accept help with neurosurgery from someone with no idea what they're doing.

If we did allow it, we'd probably apply a -8 to their result and any negative number would mean the efforting goes backwards.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

Can a player receive advantage on an attack roll for using acrobatics?
We'd award 1d6 advantage any time a player describes something in a way that makes the scene more interesting for everyone. Acrobatic moves often, but not always, earn this benefit.

A player who always says 'I do a flip and then shoot him' is not adding anything to the game, and we wouldn't reward that.

We wouldn't always provide the advantage to the attack roll either. If the acrobatics puts the player in an advantageous position, it makes sense. On the other hand, if they just cross the room quickly and unpredictably, we might make it a *disadvantage* for anyone shooting at them.

How risky is computer use, in terms of being infected by the Whisper?
While we like the idea that many computers are 'unsafe', our testers found that having computers that seize control of characters makes the players avoid them altogether.

So we might use this, but we'd endeavour to make it fairly clear why 'that particular computer' was unsafe so the players don't feel like all computers are off limits. Either that or we'd make sure the heroes had ready access to canaries.

Aren't most of the future locks electronic? Does this mean that *computer use* would be used for them instead of *defeat security*?
For any activity 'at the door' we require a *defeat security* check, since they're actually removing the panel and rewiring the circuits or otherwise foxing biometrics etc.

The only time we've allowed *computer use* to override a security component is from the security control station. This means *computer use* can often unlock all doors at once, but you usually have to get through several locked doors with *defeat security* before you can get to the security hub to do it.

Can *engineering* be used as a substitute for *defeat security*?
We'd avoid this. *Engineering* stops anytime a device has been specifically designed to prevent you doing a thing. If a player wanted to incorporate a pistol into a wheelchair, we'd allow *engineering*. On the other hand, if they want to override the single user authentication on a police issue pistol, we'd require a *defeat security* check. The clue is in the name – are they defeating a security system?

Can *disguise* only be used on people or could a character disguise a vehicle?
Disguising a vehicle so you can drive right into a secure building sounds amazing to us. We'd allow it.

Can *disguise* be used to camouflage in with nature, like building a hunting blind?
We'd take a different approach. *Disguise* is more about social camouflage than optical camouflage. Finding the correct amount of mud to blend into a swamp is considered to be part of any normal *stealth* check.

If the players want to build a hunting blind we'd use *wildscraft*. The blind would then provide 1d6 advantage to later *stealth* checks.

Can *engineering* be used instead of *disguise* for forgery?
If the intention is to create 'a second one' then we'd favour *engineering*. The engineered instance will have all the cost and functionality of the original, but under skilled examination it will be noticeably different.

Disguise mimics a specific example. So an engineer could create a signet ring, but only a forger could recreate the Daimyo's signet ring. Engineers have more attention to functionality, forgers have more attention to cosmetic detail such as scratches and security marks.

Also note our definition of forgery expands to documents and other articles that are obviously not 'engineered'.

Can *intuition (people)* determine the truth, or just identify a lie?
We often determine the amount of information provided according to *how much* the check succeeded (see Dynamic Dice Reading p.77). Most times when a character lies, *some* of what they say will be truth. In such cases, we would use the below guidelines:

INTUITION AND LIES EXAMPLE

DEGREE OF SUCCESS	EXAMPLE INFORMATION GIVEN
Marginal	"You get the impression that not everything he's said was completely true."
Solid	"He's lying about the first three things he said, but the rest was true."
Excellence	"He's lying about the first three things, and you suspect it's to protect someone he's close with rather than himself. Contrary to what he says, you get the impression he *is* an agent of the enemy, though perhaps not an entirely willing one."

William Kwan (Order: 36187234)

Obviously, we always try to preserve the best story secrets for dramatic reveals, but it's important to give the players *something of substance* for any successful check on *intuition*.

Can *Spot/listen* be used instead of *intuition* (either kind)?
We wouldn't think so. *Spot/listen* is simply about detecting things that are hard to spot (e.g., there's a tiny rock on that hill). *Intuition* is about extrapolating meaning (e.g., these tiny rocks were placed here, perhaps as a trail marker).

In Arthur Conan Doyle's classic detective stories, Watson often *spots* things but Sherlock Holmes *intuits* their meaning.

Are their limitations on tracking in an urban environment with *urbcraft*?
People do tend to leave less trail on concrete and asphalt, but the myriad of threats in the post-Whisper world also mean people favour certain routes, which balances that out a lot.

In the arcologies, we'd probably make tracking less useful. With regular cleaning and high-speed elevators, following someone is going to be more a matter of asking witnesses (or recovering security footage).

WEAPONS SKILLS

If a character throws something (or someone) what skill applies?
We'd allow both *aim* and *snapshot* attacks. A brick may not have a holo-scope on it, but it still matters whether you lob it without thinking or carefully gauge your shot.

If an object is heavy and so large it would be difficult to dodge (like a build-12 augmented throwing a car at someone) we might use the *force* skill as the attack roll.

CONVERSATION AND COERCION

Can a character make an argument that a given virtue should apply because of the nature of the topic, such as a courageous character trying to rally a militia?
We'd encourage this, and it actually couples with the rules as written. As the GM, you might decide the various folk that make up the militia might *normally* look for a genuine character. When confronted with dire circumstances, however, it's reasonable to assume they'd be looking for someone courageous.

The only thing to watch out for here is that one player isn't always first to the fore with an explanation of why *her* virtue is perfect here. The rules are intended to ensure everyone has an opportunity to be the parties most captivating speaker.

Should I pre-determine the favoured virtue and vice of every character?
We don't. If we expect the players are going to try and convince someone when we're putting a session together, we'll put some thought into this. The rest of the time we adlib on the spot.

If you can't think of anything, just pick one that applies to the players that hasn't come up in a while.

There are a lot more virtues and vices than there are characters in a party. Would that mean most characters will favour a virtue, or vice, not present in the party?
If we were trying to create a statistic representation of society, this would be very true. Instead we try to assign virtue/vice affinities that match the party in most instances.

On the odd occasion, the party *will* meet someone that they just can't find common ground with, and that's okay, but it shouldn't be the norm.

Where does dishonesty fit in?
We used the same process as always. The difficulty a character has believing the premise they're being told is about their personal feelings, not the truth of the premise.

The players may tell an opponent that there is a battlecruiser in orbit with a precision laser trained on their forehead. This sounds farfetched, both because of the rarity of such a vessel and the difficulty in immediately verifying it. We might set the difficulty of coercing a character on this basis quite high, and that number would be the same regardless of whether the ship existed or not. Things don't become more inherently believable just because they're true.

Are there any penalties to lying?
Certainly; they're just not built into the game mechanics. As in real life, the danger of a lie is that the truth is often *verifiable*.

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Suppose our players lied about their ability to monitor a character, and based on that lie, they convince him to stop selling weapons to a cult. Chafing under these restrictions, it is likely he'll attempt to confirm that ability to monitor him.

If he can satisfy himself that the coercion was based on a lie, he'll start selling weapons to the cult again. Obviously the same is *not* true if it turns out the party were telling the truth.

It's also worth pointing out that how trustworthy the player characters are known to be can have a great impact on the reception they get. We try not to be too heavy-handed about this, it's a game after all, but a reputation for honesty is a valuable currency for adventurers who will be strangers most everywhere they go.

In short, most lies have an expiry date, and once you're branded a liar, even the truth may not get you as far as it used too.

Some of the vices have a very clear financial cost associated with them, can the players lose yen as a result of a failed vice check?
If a character has to spend money as a part of their vice, we'll generally reflect that, but we limit such costs to around five percent of the player's cash.

More importantly, we try to make sure that things can go both ways. If a player with 'Den of Cards' ends up playing a game, we might ask them to part with a ¥1,000 buy in. We would *also* let them make a luck check to see if they can win back double that bet. Thus, succumbing to a vice might also help.

Obviously not every skill has a clear cut 'win', but not all rewards are financial. A character might meet a future ally or discover an important equipment vendor.

Vice shouldn't be a punishment, just a streak of colour.

COMBAT – ACTIONS

Because play proceeds clockwise, wouldn't it be to the players' advantage to have the player with the highest agility character sitting on the GM's left?
Sure and they're welcome to do so if they think it's worth their time. Our test groups never found turn order to be super important in *Wireless Soul Transmission*. The roll is mainly to allow a little variety in which player goes first.

If your group prefers, you can proceed through the players in order of their rolls, or skip rolling altogether and always start with the player on the GM's left so the GM goes last. Any system works so long as everyone can keep track, and everyone gets a go every round.

During simultaneous surprise, can a character perform an action other than shooting?
Of course. If they're close enough a *melee* attack might be possible (no more than a couple of squares away). For most other actions (diving for cover, sounding an alarm, etc.) we'll get the player to roll *react*.

The key thing is that long, complicated actions aren't possible. We wouldn't allow an *aimed* shot or weapon setup during simultaneous surprise because the character would be shot. We'd allow any action so long as it has a sense of that immediate flight or fight response.

The *Play Guide* describes three methods for handling players who've gone off map, which should I use when?
The most common reason for a player going off map is a sniper who wants to set up in some distant overwatch position. In this case, we always use a simple description of where they've set up (and more importantly what they can hit from there).

If we expect melee combatants to be charging after an off-map player, we'd use the small secondary map method. It gives them some options for tactical manoeuvre.

The rough map of the larger area is what we use when a player is moving around rapidly off map (generally with a vehicle). We'll also use this approach if the players are attacking a component of a larger installation and can be expected to regularly exchange fire with reinforcements that are trying to make it onto the combat map.

When in doubt: use the short description. It's the quickest, and if it's not working, you can fall back on a map.

Should a GM track munitions tokens for opponents?
We've always found our villains get dispatched too quickly to be worried about such trivialities as ammunition.

William Kwan (Quote: 2018/7/31)

If a character's hand and forearm armour is too strong for a melee combatant's AP, do they still count as 'unarmed' for the purposes of the 'Armed versus Unarmed' penalty?
We don't imagine that they should. A steel armguard can deflect just as effectively as a steel sword.

If a character is hidden and at point blank range, can they get the 1d6 benefit from both conditions?
We certainly think so.

For the purposes of a stealth attack, what determines if an opponent 'doesn't identify the attacker as a threat'?
Well, most characters don't think their allies constitute a threat. Someone who appears to be dead certainly would be overlooked.

If combat hasn't started yet, we actually use an even broader definition. A character with no visible weapons, especially if they appear to be a bystander rather than an interested party, could manage a stealth attack.

Note that most of these definitions we'd not use against the players. Players can be quite offended by the GM telling them 'they weren't expecting an attack', so it's often best to just let the opponent make a normal attack. It's not like you don't have plenty more bad guys to replace him when he dies.

COMBAT – DEFENDING

Total cover suggests you have to start in cover to benefit, but couldn't a player simply move out of line of sight to get the same effect?
We interpret the rules to mean that, if a character is charging down the field and ducks out of line of sight with his last movement point, he can still be hit. If he could be hit for most of his turn, it seems reasonable that he couldn't suddenly become invincible at the end.

In practice, we try not to use this rule too much unless a player is noticeably trying to exploit the limitations of a turn system. In most other cases, it's more intuitive for everyone to just assume that characters can only be attacked in the tile where they land.

What happens if a character is struck in a hit location that has been cut off?
This shouldn't come up a lot, most characters who've lost *both* legs (for example) are unlikely to be still in the fight. If this was an attack against a player character we'd probably treat it as a miss (since that character is clearly in dire straights).

In most other cases we'd just bump the hit to the nearest logical hit location (if the forearms are missing we'd move the hit to the elbow).

What is the point of minor injuries if they don't affect wounds tolerance?
We use them to build drama. We don't usually even make players record minor wounds, but in terms of combat a nicked shoulder is far more interesting than yet another miss.

It's also important to remember that a poison can be delivered on a minor wound.

Most important characters are going to be heroic, so when would the shock rules need to treat a non-heroic character as heroic for the Death of Hero checks?
It's possible for an unimportant character to become important in context. We've used this when players accidentally hit a bystander and then wanted to save them.

The bystander was a background character and, therefore, not heroic but became important when the players decided they didn't want her death on their conscience.

Are there injuries where Death of a Hero checks wouldn't be allowed?
We try not to do this, but it can happen. Our first line of defence is interpreting injuries slightly differently when they happen to players, as distinct from others. A neck that's been 'cleaved' with a katana would be decapitation for anyone *except* a player character. With player characters, we describe a horrific neck wound, but not an immediately lethal one.

Beyond this most 'no surviving that' injuries occur when a character is caught in the blast from a very large weapon. While we try to build our story so that such encounters don't happen, we can't always prevent it. If we warn the players that the reactor is about to go critical and they want to stay to see it happen, we can't prevent the inevitable.

Normally we'll provide an additional warning that the weapon (or explosion) will completely annihilate their body, and there'll be no 'Death of a Hero' checks allowed. Past that point, it's the players' choice if they want to go out in a tremendous blast of thermonuclear fire.

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If a character has 'died for good', can they roll up a new character and rejoin the game?
Of course! If they want back in, you should have a discussion with the group about how to fit the new character in (similar to the group backstory you figured out in session one, see p.72, Bringing the Party Together).

We'll often also discuss with a player the option of 'taking over' one of the party allies. Having an existing character step up to fill the hole is often easier than introducing a complete stranger that the party suddenly finds completely trustworthy.

While resting, can a character make a *medicine* check to heal a serious wound?
If they have a trauma or surgery kit, yes. We consider a rest to have all the benefits of regrouping as well.

What determines whether characters can restore their munitions tokens or not?
We try not to be too picky about this, so by default, we assume they always reload when they rest. If they're resting 'behind enemy lines', we might decide they can't restore munitions and have to make do with what they have.

Does the Dragon Mobility System work differently in different gravities?
We'd assume it can't reasonably lift a character in *dangerously* high-G. At high-Gs, we'd halve the jump benefits it allows.

At low-G, we'd double the jump benefits and in zero-g we'd treat it as a jetpack. When used as a jet pack we'd allow a character to move the full distance the Dragon allows, but while maintaining their *evade* defence and making as many turns as necessary.

We'd leave it up to the player whether they were stopped at the end, or to what degree they'd decelerated.

Can radiation sickness be cured like a normal disease?
We have always assumed that, by the far-flung future of this game, medical science has found a way to treat radiation sickness and almost every other disease.

VEHICLES

Supposed the players have an abundance of time, what would be the process in removing the wireless controls from a vehicle?
This is a lot more difficult than it sounds. These vehicles are designed to allow their automated systems precedence over more fallible organic drivers and significant fail-safes are in place to prevent maverick owners from disabling these overrides. Additionally, most vehicles use a wireless connection between the dash controls and the mechanics of the vehicle; it's not enough to simply remove the wireless transmitters; you must also build new connections by hard line and write new software to manage the connection.

Based on that, we would use the following guidelines:

Character must have access to a vehicle workshop and an *engineering* skill of at least 8

If this is the first time the character has performed this process, we'd require an *engineering* [effort 100] check to develop the process. Each check requires a full day.

Once the development process is finished, or if it is unnecessary, the character must now perform an *engineering* [effort 80] check to make the actual changes to a given vehicle. These checks also require a full day.

The development process is specific to a given type of vehicle. If a character completed the process on a domestic car, we'd allow them to skip it for other domestic cars, trucks, and motorcycles. We'd require a separate process for military vehicles (because they have more security) or LEVVs/aircraft, etc. (because their control systems are very different).

Once this process is complete, your vehicle is completely Whisper safe (until an augmented gets behind the wheel, of course).

Can a character disembark from a moving vehicle?
Definitely! We'd allow such a bold player to dive out at any point during the vehicle's move, but they wouldn't be allowed to take any further actions until their own turn came up.

Assuming an ally is piloting the vehicle, or it's otherwise slowed a little, we'd call it a painful fall (suffers 1 fracture). If the vehicle provides no leeway to the disembarking character at all, then it's a dangerous fall (1d4 +2 fractures). In either case, we'd allow an

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acrobatics [15] check to reduce the wound by one category.

Can a vehicle turn on the spot?
We'd require most vehicles to at least describe a small circle to turn. Even a motorcycle must be wheeled about.

LEVV/hover vehicles and tracked vehicles are two exceptions, both able to pivot on the spot to face any direction.

When is it appropriate to apply disadvantage to characters shooting from a moving vehicle?
We look at the relative motion of the vehicle and its target. Two vehicles side by side on the highway might both be going outrageously fast, but relative to each other there might be little motion, so we'd apply no penalty.

On the other hand, a vehicle going quite slowly over rough terrain will bound around a lot and might prove a difficult platform to for shooting even a stationary target. Here we'd apply the disadvantage.

If a target is rammed by a vehicle, should the target be displaced?
We say yes! It makes a more dynamic game, but try to keep size in mind. We'd let a vehicle drive a character all the way into a wall (in which case we'd probably inflict a second wound, as though the vehicle had rammed them twice)

A car that rams the side of a battle cruiser, however, will find that ship unlikely to move.

What happens if a target is run over, as opposed to just rammed?
If a character goes 'under the tires' we'd inflict the ramming damage again.

Any 'hovercraft' type vehicle will not inflict damage because its weight is so evenly spread out.

What happens if a vehicle rams a building?
The first question is 'does the vehicle go through the wall'. We tend to like 'yes' as the answer unless we absolutely can't justify it (no, a motorcycle won't go through the concrete wall of that bunker).

However, the second question is 'will the vehicle still run afterwards'. We'd use something like the below table to determine the sort of hit the vehicle takes.

VEHICLE DAMAGE FROM RAMMING BUILDINGS

CONSTRUCTION	DAMAGE TYPE
Light (plaster, drywall)	None
Domestic (wood, bricks etc.)	LAV
Reinforced (concrete)	Blast
Heavy military (steel, composites)	Large blast

If a pursuing vehicle loses contact, can they rejoin the chase later if it's still going?
We don't allow villains to do this. We *might* allow a group of players to do so. If they're in a city, we might allow them an *urbcraft* check to find a shortcut to catch back up.

How do you deal with players being left behind in chases because they fell off a vehicle?
We find the best defence is prevention. If a player character is attempting something risky (like jumping between vehicles) and they fail, we'll apply a mental trauma wound and have them *just* make it.

If all else fails, we encourage the players to use whatever's around. If the players are in a city they might need to steal an abandoned vehicle, despite the risks that entails.

If they're in the middle of nowhere, they might need another player vehicle to come back and get them. This might increase the risk to everyone, but the party succeeds together or not at all.

The key here is that it's actually the *party's* problem, not yours. Your role is simply to make sure that you give any credible idea a solid chance of success so that the game doesn't bog down.

What if my players want to take a different path during a chase?
We find that this most often happens when the 'on rails' route seems unnecessarily dangerous. If the players are fleeing in vehicles and your description says 'you drive straight into the death factory' your players might wonder if this is really the best choice.

There are three tools we use to help convince players that the planned route is the most amazing:

1. We remind them that it *is* the most amazing. "Well if you *want* to go the boring way around."
2. If they're the pursuers, we provide an honest assessment of the chance their quarry will find an exit to the death factory they didn't anticipate.

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3. If they're trying to escape, we suggest that they're going into the death factory because they're better drivers than the people behind them, and it's a good way to thin out the opposition.

If these things don't work that's fine, we'll allow the players to take a different route and we'll try to improvise something interesting on that branch.

As in all cases, we'll put the most interesting path we can come up with before the players, but we'll never tell them they *must* follow it.

What happens if there are multiple escaping vehicles in a chase?
Where possible, we try to group the vehicles into a convoy. So, if the players and several allied vehicles are fleeing, we'd group all the allied vehicles together. Those vehicles are all considered to be in the same range band and will all succeed or fail based on a single roll. If a player wants to operate a pilot vehicle for the convoy, they could make that roll.

Once the convoy is understood, we track other vehicles relative to the convoy. The player escorts may fall behind or catch up as they negotiate the challenges themselves.

We generally introduce a couple of new mechanics for this as well.

Escort vehicles can 'block': A driver may spend a simple action driving a blocking action. This prevents any pursuing vehicle from passing them this round. In this way, an escort can force pursuers to defeat them before advancing on the convoy.

Vehicles in the same range band as the convoy can choose where in the convoy they're travelling (in front, behind, third car from the front, etc.).

How would a race work?
We'd start all vehicles 'alongside' but as soon as they start hitting obstacles some would fall back. At this point you should consider everyone to be pursuing the vehicle that is in first place.

We also add a new mechanic by which a character may suffer a voluntary 1d6 disadvantage to take the obstacles dangerously quickly, but success means they would move *up* a range band, rather than just maintaining their current position.

We only use this mechanic when the racers aren't shooting at one another.

For the purpose of repair parts, is an LEVV an aircraft or a ground vehicle?
We normally consider the domestic LEVVs a ground vehicle, and the Gyrfalcon, C-LEVV & Peacemakers as aircraft. A good indicator is the speed rating, 3 and above is normally an aircraft of some sort.

Does the salvage mechanic mean that any machine can be disabled with an *engineering* [10] check?
To prevent abuse, we normally only allow salvage of pre-Shatter and abandoned equipment at this difficulty. Things that are tamper proof, or still in use, will be harder to salvage from.

How do you determine the difficulty for an aircraft crash?
We go with our gut, and most times the difficulty comes out at about 20. The below table might help give you some idea how we keep arriving at that number.

AIRCRAFT CRASH EXAMPLE DIFFICULTY

DIFFICULTY	EVENT
10	An intentional crash while under power (e.g., emergency landing with no airstrip)
+5	Aircraft is un-powered
+5	Crash was sudden (e.g., failed check while flying low)
+5	Unforgiving terrain (e.g., forests, mountainside etc.)
+5	Aircraft was in combat.

If the wireless vulnerable electronics were removed from an LEVV, would it change the rules for Domestic LEVV flight?
We think so. We'd make the crew use the *pilot* skill and treat it as a VTOL aircraft.

If a vulnerability includes 'all weapons', do those weapons still have to meet the vehicle's damage threshold?
Not unless it specifies. If it simply says 'All weapons' then then you could break the weakness with the tonfa.

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APPENDIX IV
ADVERSARY TABLES

WHISPER AGENTS – THE RUINED

NAME	MOVING	SKILLS	DEFENCES	COMBAT	NOTES
BERSERKER – SCAMPS Minion tolerance p.251	4 Dash 8 Long Dash	Basic: +1 Unskilled: +0	Cover: 15 Evade: 10 Base: 5 IC: 8	**+3 Unarmed:** Blunt [Padding] [1–4] [5] [6] [–]	**Pack Tactics:** +1d6 advantage per additional scamp **Peel the armour:** See detailed entry
BERSERKER – GUNNER Minion tolerance **Armour:** Fibreweave vest p.251	4 Dash 8 Long Dash	Basic: +1 Unskilled: +0	Cover: 15 Evade: 10 Base: 5 IC: 8	**+2 Auto Pistol:** Piercing [Fibreweave] [1] [2–4] [5] [6]	**Gunners don't use special abilities like autofire.** **Augments:** Small chance of Armsmaster fire control or Aegis vision system.
BERSERKER – HPDF GUNNER Minion tolerance **Armour:** Padding with Ceramic torso/head p.252	5 Dash 10 Long Dash	Basic: +2 Unskilled: +0	Cover: 17 Evade: 11 Base: 5 IC: 8	**+4 Pulse Rifle:** Piercing [Ceramic] [1] [2–3] [4–5] [6]	**Gunners don't use special abilities like autofire.** **Augments:** High chance of Armsmaster fire control or Aegis vision system.
BERSERKER – PAINLESS Tolerance 0 – Painless (see detailed entry) p.252	4 Dash 8 Long Dash	Basic: +1 Unskilled: +0 +10 in *Force*	Cover: 15 Evade: 10 Base: 5 IC: 8	**+3 Unarmed:** Blunt [Ceramic] [1] [2] [3–4] [5–6]	**Knock back:** a react [15] check to avoid falling prone when hit. **Augments:** 2 Hercules arms
SUZERAIN **Tolerance:** 2 p.254	5 Dash 10 Long Dash	Basic: +3 Unskilled: +2 +6 in *Resist, Computer Use*	Cover: 17 Evade: 12 Base: 5 IC: 16	**+3 Unarmed:** Blunt [Padding] [1-4] [5] [6] [–]	**Wireless Attacks:** See detailed entry **Bonus Skills:** +6 ranks in any 2 skills besides *Resist* and *Computer Use*
RONIN – ASPIRANT **Tolerance:** 3 **Armour:** Fibreweave vest p.256	6 Dash 12 Long Dash	Basic: +3 Unskilled: +2 +6 in *Resist, React, Acrobatics*	Cover: 18 Evade: 15 Base: 5 IC: 13	**+6 Katana:** Slashing [Fibreweave] [1] [2] [3–4] [5–6] **+6 Bamboo Yumi** Piercing [Fibreweave] [1] [2–3] [4–5] [6]	**Feats of Skill:** 2 **Heijoshin I:** Turn 1 hit into a miss. **Rei:** -1 Feat of Skill to make counterattack if missed **Gi:** -1 Feat of skill to use Weak-Point Hit Location Table **Of the Spider clan:** See detailed entry.
TRUE RONIN **Tolerance:** 5 **Armour:** Fibreweave with ceramic torso/head p.261	7 Dash 14 Long Dash	Basic: +5 Unskilled: +2 +10 in *Resist, React, Acrobatics*	Cover: 22 Evade: 19 Base: 5 IC: 15	**+10 Nano-forged Katana:** Slashing [Ceramic] [–] [1] [2–3] [4–6] **+10 Yumi Flash Bow** Explosive [Ceramic] [1] [2–3] [4–5] [6]	**Feats of Skill:** 3 **Heijoshin III:** Turn 3 hits into misses. **Rei:**-1 Feat of Skill to make counterattack if missed **Meiyo:**-1 Feat of skill to gain additional melee attack **Gi:**-1 Feat of skill to use Weak-Point Hit Location Table **Of the Spider clan:** See detailed entry.

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WHISPER AGENTS – THE RAISED

NAME	MOVING	SKILLS	DEFENCES	COMBAT	NOTES
COLLECTOR Self-repair – see detailed description **Armour:** Steel, Fibreweave weak points p.253	5 Dash 10 Long Dash	Basic: +5 Unskilled: +2 +6 in *Force, Spot/listen Athletics*	Cover: 15 Evade: 10 Base: 5 IC: 10	**+8 Harpoons x2:** Piercing [Ceramic] [1] [2–3] [4–5] [6] **+8 Grappling Claw:** Blunt [Fibreweave] [1] [2–3] [4–5] [6] **+8 Circular Saw:** Slashing [Fibreweave] [1] [2–3] [4–5] [6]	**Harpoon:** A punctured or worse hit and the victim is caught. Next round the victim is reeled to a square adjacent the collector. **Grappling claw:** Any successful attack with grappling claw and the victim is pinned. Opposed Force check to escape (+10 for the Collector's claw) **Circular saw:** Once victim is pinned, the collector's attack with circular saw is an incidental. Each round increase damage, or AP, until it achieves a Cleaved result. **Collectors Call:** See detailed entry
BANSHEE **Tolerance:** 2 Program – only vulnerable to wireless attacks p.257	6 Glide	Basic: +3 Unskilled: +2 +8 in *Resist, Computer Use*	IC: 18	**+9 Decompile:** Destroy a simple program or inflict a point of mental trauma on programs with wounds tolerance. **+8 Spear Eternal:** Inflict a point of mental trauma. Character must roll resist versus banshee's +8 Computer Use or be unable to act on their turn.	**Scream:** +6 versus IC of all opponents in medium range. Roll d4 for each hit target: 1 – Stunned [15] 2 – Suffer a point of mental trauma 3 – Tries to remove their implant [20] 4 – Dominated by the Whisper [25] Resist effort versus bracketed figure for affected characters to escape effect.
ONI **Tolerance:** 2 – Painless **Armour:** Steel, Fibreweave weak points p.262	4 Dash 8 Long Dash	Basic: +6 Unskilled: +2 +8 in *Athletics, Endurance, Force*	Cover: 20 Evade: 13 Base: 5 IC: 6	**+7 Amorphous Metal Wakizashi:** Slashing [Ceramic] [1] [2–3] [4–5] [6] **+7 Energy Rifle:** Explosive [Steel] [1] [2] [3–5] [6] **+7 Pulse Gun** Blunt [Steel] [1] [2–3] [4–5] [6] **+7 Artemis Launcher** Explosive [Steel] [1] [2–3] [4–5] [6]	A simple action braces both the Pulse gun and the Artemis Oni are considered to be wielding all weapons simultaneously. Any natural 10 or higher will trigger an attack with another weapon. **Nano regeneration:** Heal one critical injury or less each round.

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WHISPER AGENTS – THE RECLAIMED

NAME	MOVING	SKILLS	DEFENCES	COMBAT	NOTES
PEACEMAKER DRONE **Tolerance:** 3 **Armour:** Adv. Composite **Thresholds:** Blast/Large blast **Lift Latticework** [Engineering/Warcraft 15] Steel armour, vehicle forced to land **Control Cores** LAV or better weapon hit to head or eyes destroys one of three control cores. p.258	Flight/VTOL Rating: 4 in atmosphere, 6 in space	Basic: +5 Unskilled: +3 +6 in *Force, Spot/listen, Stealth, Pilot*	Cover: 10 Evade: 5 Base: 2 IC: 15	**+8 Talons**: Piercing [Ceramic] [1] [2] [3–4] [5–6] **+8 Pulse gun x2** Blunt [Steel] [1] [2–3] [4–5] [6] **+8 Rocket Pack x2** Explosive [Adv. Composite] [1] [2–4] [5] [6] **+8 Apollo Missile Launcher** Explosive [Adv. Composite] [1] [2] [3–4] [5–6]	**Flares:** 1d6 disadvantage to an attack roll once per round. **Grab and Crush:** On a successful talon attack victim must react [15] or be grabbed. Automatic talon damage against victim each round.
CHEVALIER **Tolerance:** 4 **Armour:** Adv. Composite **Thresholds:** Blast/Large blast **Weak Rear Armour** [Engineering/Warcraft 15] Steel armour vs attacks from rear **External Sensors** [Engineering/Warcraft 15] Ceramic. Any hit blinds the vehicle to one of four facings (front, right, left, rear). Vehicle has 3 additional sensors, 1 on each weapon. **Control Cores** Adv. Composite Blast weapons that hit a crew, gunner or driver hit location destroy one of three control cores p.259	Tracked Rating 2	Basic: +4 Unskilled: +2 +5 *Drive*	Cover: 20 Evade: 7 Base: 2 IC: 15	**+5 Ram:** Blunt [Adv. Composite] [1] [2] [3–4] [5–6] **+6 Energy Cannon** Explosive [Adv. Composite] [1] [2] [3–4] [5–6] **+6 Pulse gun x2** Blunt [Steel] [1] [2–3] [4–5] [6]	**Smoke Launchers**: Smoke until end of chevalier's next turn. Attacks through the smoke suffer 1d6 disadvantage. **Watchtower AMS:** Shoots down first missile attack against vehicle each round. **Magnetic screen:** Choose facing, attacks across that facing roll versus cover defence.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

THE ZAIBATSU AND THEIR EMPLOYEES – CORPORATE EMPLOYEES

NAME	MOVING	SKILLS	DEFENCES	COMBAT	NOTES
DOMESTIC EMPLOYEE Minion tolerance p.266	4 Dash 8 Long Dash	Basic: +2 Unskilled: +0 +2 *Civilised Lore, Work (Domestic)*	Cover: 15 Evade: 10 Base: 5 IC: –	**+0 Unarmed:** Blunt [Padding] [1-4] [5] [6] [–]	
LEAD SCIENTIST **Tolerance:** 3 p.266	4 Dash 8 Long Dash	Basic: +1 Unskilled: +2 +9 *Civilised Lore and one specialty*	Cover: 15 Evade: 10 Base: 5 IC: –	**+0 Unarmed:** Blunt [Padding] [1-4] [5] [6] [–]	**Specialty:** +9 in one skill from *Computer Use, Medical* or *Engineering* or *work* specialty **Expert Advice:** Provide advantage as an off-turn action
CORPORATE REPRESENTATIVE **Tolerance:** 0 **Armour:** Fibreweave vest p.267	5 Dash 10 Long Dash	Basic: +3 Unskilled: +2 +4 in *Drive, Spot/Listen, Civilised Lore, Intuit. (People) Medical, Pilot*	Cover: 17 Evade: 12 Base: 5 IC: –	**+3 Auto Pistol:** Piercing [Fibreweave] [1] [2–4] [5] [6]	**Corrective Action:** On missed *aim* or *snapshot*, make a volley or autofire versus the same target.
ANDROID **Tolerance:** 0 – Painless (see detailed entry) p.267	5 Dash 10 Long Dash	Basic: +5 Unskilled: +2 +6 any one skill	Cover: 17 Evade: 12 Base: 5 IC: 14	**+2 Unarmed:** Blunt [Fibreweave] [1] [2–3] [4–5] [6]	
SHINOBI **Tolerance:** 2 **Armour:** Fibreweave p.268	7 Dash 14 Long Dash	Basic: +2 Unskilled: +2 +6 in *React, Stealth, Spot/Listen, Acrobatics, Defeat Security, Disguise, Sleight of Hand, Spycraft*	Cover: 20 Evade: 17 Base: 5 IC: –	**+6 Silenced Pistol:** Piercing [Fibreweave] [1] [2–4] [5] [6] **+6 Tantō:** Piercing [Fibreweave] [1–2] [3–4] [5–6] [–]	**Anatomy:** Use Weak-Point Hit Location Table for melee versus unaware opponents **Assassinate:** Deal maximum damage when making a melee sneak attack with a short melee weapon
EXECUTIVE **Tolerance:** 5 **Armour:** Steel p.269	5 Dash 10 Long Dash	Basic: +3 Unskilled: +4 +10 in *Resist, Civilised Lore, Intuit. (People), work (business management)*	Cover: 18 Evade: 14 Base: 5 IC: 17	**+6 Particle Needler:** Piercing [Fibreweave] [1] [2–3] [4–5] [6] **+6 Beam Ring** Slashing [Steel] [–] [1] [2–4] [5–6]	**Feats of Will:** 5 **Incentivise with quarterly bonus:** Feat of Will to give an ally an immediate extra turn. **Place on Performance Management Program:** Feat of Will to allow an ally to reroll miss or failed skill check. **Brand loyalty:** Ally within short range takes a hit meant for the executive.

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THE ZAIBATSU AND THEIR EMPLOYEES – GINBUSHI

NAME	MOVING	SKILLS	DEFENCES	COMBAT	NOTES
HOUSE GUARDS Minion tolerance **Armour:** Fibreweave Vest p.269	5 Dash 10 Long Dash	Basic: +3 Unskilled: +2 +4 in *Drive*	Cover: 17 Evade: 12 Base: 5 IC: –	**+4 Auto Pistol:** Piercing [Fibreweave] [1] [2–4] [5] [6] **+4 Submachine gun:** Piercing [Ceramic] [1] [2–4] [5] [6]	
GINBUSHI– ASPIRANT **Tolerance:** 3 **Armour:** Fibreweave vest p.270	6 Dash 12 Long Dash	Basic: +3 Unskilled: +2 +6 in *Resist, React, Acrobatics*	Cover: 18 Evade: 15 Base: 5 IC: 13	**+6 Katana:** Slashing [Fibreweave] [1] [2] [3–4] [5–6] **+6 Auto Pistol:** Piercing [Fibreweave] [1] [2–4] [5] [6]	**Feats of Skill:** 2 **Heijoshin I:** Turn 1 hits into misses. **Rei:** Feat of Skill to make counterattack if missed **Gi:** Feat of Skill to use Weak-Point Hit Location Table
GINBUSHI – TRUE SAMURAI **Tolerance:** 3 **Armour:** Fibreweave with ceramic torso/head p.271	7 Dash 14 Long Dash	Basic: +5 Unskilled: +2 +9 in *Resist, React, Acrobatics*	Cover: 22 Evade: 19 Base: 5 IC: 15	**+9 Nano-forged Katana:** Slashing [Ceramic] [–] [1] [2–3] [4–6] **+8 Yumi Flash Bow** Explosive [Ceramic] [1] [2–3] [4–5] [6] **+8 Auto Pistol:** Piercing [Fibreweave] [1] [2–4] [5] [6]	**Feats of Skill:** 3 **Heijoshin III:** Turn 3 hits into misses. **Rei:** Feat of Skill to make counterattack if missed **Meiyo:** Feat of skill to gain additional melee attack **Gi:** Feat of Skill to use Weak-Point Hit Location Table
GINBUSHI – BLADEMASTER **Tolerance:** 5 **Armour:** Fibreweave with ceramic torso/head p.272	7 Dash 14 Long Dash	Basic: +6 Unskilled: +2 +12 in *Resist, React, Endurance, Acrobatics, Civilised Lore, Intuit. – Places/Things, Warcraft*	Cover: 28 Evade: 24 Base: 5 IC: 18	**+12 Nano-forged Katana:** Slashing [Ceramic] [–] [1] [2–3] [4–6] **+10 Gauss Pistol** Blunt [Ceramic] [1] [2] [3–4] [5–6]	**Feats of Skill:** 3 **Feats of Will:** 3 **Heijoshin III:** Turn 3 hits into misses. **Heijoshin Mastery:** Feat of Will, all attacks directed at Blademaster miss until the beginning of its next turn. **Chugi:** Feat of Will immediately cure poison, disease or serious wound **Rei Mastery:** Feat of Will to make counterattack against every miss until the beginning of blademaster's next turn. **Meiyo Mastery:** Feat of Skill to begin combo chain. Each hit triggers a follow-up attack.

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SURVIVORS AND MERCENARIES

NAME	MOVING	SKILLS	DEFENCES	COMBAT	NOTES
SCAVENGER Minion tolerance **Amour:** Padding p.274	5 Dash 10 Long Dash	Basic: +3 Unskilled: +0 +3 in *Urbcraft, Engineering, Work(Farming)*	Cover: 15 Evade: 10 Base: 5 IC: –	**+2 Auto Pistol:** Piercing [Fibreweave] [1] [2–4] [5] [6] **+2 Shotgun:** Blunt [Fibreweave] [1-2] [3–5] [6] [–]	
CRUSADER **Tolerance:** 0 **Armour:** Padding p.274	5 Dash 10 Long Dash	Basic: +3 Unskilled: +0 +5 in *Defeat Security, Urbcraft, Warcraft*	Cover: 18 Evade: 12 Base: 5 IC: –	**+5 Assault Rifle:** Piercing [Ceramic] [1] [2–3] [4–5] [6] **+5 Frag Grenades:** Explosive [Ceramic] [1] [2–3] [4–5] [6]	
AUGMENTED SCRAPPER **Tolerance:** 0 **Armour:** Padding with ceramic torso/head p.275	6 Dash 12 Long Dash	Basic: +4 Unskilled: +2 +5 in *Athletics, Force, Endurance, Defeat Security, Urbcraft*	Cover: 20 Evade: 14 Base: 5 IC: 6	**+5 Submachine gun:** Piercing [Ceramic] [1] [2–4] [5] [6] **+5 Assault Rifle:** Piercing [Ceramic] [1] [2–3] [4–5] [6] **+5 Frag Grenades:** Explosive [Ceramic] [1] [2–3] [4–5] [6]	
FURUI KIGA WAKAISHU Minion tolerance **Armour:** Padding p.276	5 Dash 10 Long Dash	Basic: +3 Unskilled: +2 +6 in *Force, React, Stealth, Defeat Security, Disguise, Sleight of Hand*	Cover: 16 Evade: 14 Base: 5 IC: 8	**+5 Heavy Pistol:** Blunt [Ceramic] [1] [2–3] [4–5] [6] **+5 Tonfa:** Blunt [Padding] [1] [2–3] [4–5] [6]	**Augmented:** May have Hercules arm or leg and remotely detonated explosive implant
TECH EXPERT **Tolerance:** 3 **Armour:** Padding p.276	5 Dash 10 Long Dash	Basic: +3 Unskilled: +3 +6 in *Engineering, Computer Use, Defeat Security*	Cover: 16 Evade: 12 Base: 5 IC: –	**+4 Heavy Pistol:** Blunt [Ceramic] [1] [2–3] [4–5] [6] **+4 Shotgun:** Blunt [Fibreweave] [1-2] [3–5] [6] [–]	
WIREDIVER **Tolerance:** 3 **Armour:** Padding p.277	5 Dash 10 Long Dash	Basic: +2 Unskilled: +2 +6 in *Resist, Computer Use, Defeat Security, Disguise, Spycraft*	Cover: 16 Evade: 12 Base: 5 IC: 18	**+4 Auto Pistol:** Piercing [Fibreweave] [1] [2–4] [5] [6]	**Wireless Attacks:** See detailed entry
SETTLEMENT HEADMAN/ HEADWOMAN **Tolerance:** 5 **Armour:** Padding, with ceramic torso/head p.278	5 Dash 10 Long Dash	Basic: +4 Unskilled: +3 +8 in *Endurance, Spot/listen, Urbcraft*	Cover: 20 Evade: 14 Base: 5 IC: –	**+4 Heavy Pistol:** Blunt [Ceramic] [1] [2–3] [4–5] [6]	**Concentrate your Fire!:** Select 5 allies; they make an immediate attack against the target of your choice. **Aim for its Weakness!:** Once per round, allow an ally to use the Weak-Point Hit Location Table. **Get Clear!:** Once per round, an ally who has been hit may move instead of being hit.

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ANIMALS

NAME	MOVING	SKILLS	DEFENCES	COMBAT	NOTES
RAT Minion tolerance p.279	6 Dash 12 Long Dash	Basic:-5 Unskilled: +0 +5 in *React, Resist, Spot/Listen, Stealth, Urbcraft*	Cover: 20 Evade: 17 Base: 10 IC: –	**+6 Tiny Teeth & Claws**: Piercing [Unarmoured] [1–6] [–] [–] [–]	
TAMARIN MONKEY Minion tolerance p.279	6 Dash 12 Long Dash	Basic:-3 Unskilled: +3 +5 in *React, Stealth, Acrobatics, Sleight of hand, Wildscraft*	Cover: 18 Evade: 15 Base: 8 IC: –	**+6 Small Teeth & Claws:** Piercing [Padding] [1–4] [5–6] [–] [–]	**Natural Climbers:** Climb any non-sheer surface without a skill check. 1d6 advantage to jump from perch to perch while climbing.
DOG Minion tolerance p.280	6 Dash 12 Long Dash	Basic: +2 Unskilled: +3 +3 in *Intuit (People), Intuit (Places/ things), Urbcraft*	Cover: 16 Evade: 13 Base: 6 IC: –	**+4 Bite:** Piercing [Padding] [1–2] [3–4] [5–6] [–]	**Scent Tracking:** Follow any creature that has passed through an area within the last 24 hours.
Gray Hawk Minion tolerance p.280	Flight: move to any tile in medium range	Basic:-3 Unskilled: +1 +8 in *Spot/Listen*	Cover: 18 Evade: 23 Base: 7 IC: –	**+8 Talons:** Slashing [Padding] [1–3] [4–6] [–] [–] **+8 Beak:** Slashing [Padding] [1–2] [3–5] [6] [–]	While landed may only use Base Defence
WOLFLIONS **Tolerance:** 1 p.281	7 Dash 14 Long Dash	Basic: +6 Unskilled: +3 +6 in *Wildscraft Intuit (People), Intuit (Places/ things)*	Cover: 16 Evade: 14 Base: 5 IC: –	**+8 Large Claws:** Slashing [Fibreweave] [1] [2–3] [4–6] [–] **+4 Bite:** Piercing [Ceramic] [–] [1–2] [3–4] [5–6]	**Scent Tracking:** Follow any creature that has passed through an area within the last 24 hours. Pounce: Move 3 squares and attack with claws. Additionally, opposed force to knock and pin target. **Killing Bite:** Choose hit location and add advantage for bite attacks versus pinned opponents.

William Kwan (Order #36487234)

APPENDIX V

PRINTABLE RESOURCES

SESSION 1 HANDOUTS - PRINTABLE

S0101 – DNR LABS FLOOR 2

Subject: UPA will not be tolerated

To: [Group:All employees]

From: Site Manager Carmen Light

We are aware that the run of seizures and mental breaks on Floor 2 have made many of you nervous. Managers are already reporting to me rumours of nerve gas, wireless attacks, and even vengeful whispering ghosts.

I'd like to reassure you that this building's wireless space is protected by state of the art firewalls, and every level is fitted with both toxin filters and alarms. I work in the same building as the rest of you, and I'm not afraid.

Despite this, I know of at least two employees who have made things difficult for the rest of us, in this already trying circumstance, by heading home without authorisation. As we near our looming release date, I would remind you of HR's zero-tolerance policy towards unscheduled absences. Those who succumb to paranoia may leave, but they will find they do not have jobs to return to.

S0102 – DNR LABS FLOOR 3

Subject: Re: QA concerns

To: Dr. Andrew Coles

From: Site Manager Carmen Light

Damnit Andrew, the test subject for the GMAs is arriving today, I don't want to hear reservations, and I certainly don't want to hear ghost stories about how one of the arms has started talking to you.

Keep your neurons out of the tabloid sites, and give me the greenlight on my damn prototype, or you can kiss your quarterly bonus goodbye.

William Kwan (Order : 36487234)

S0103 – DNR LABS FLOOR 4

//Tencom Cerebnet - Wireless Neural Conversation Log #347
//This information constitutes a private record and may be confidential and protected by law

Carmen Light – Site Manager: I'm worried about the communication blackout. If our test subject doesn't arrive as scheduled, is there any way to demonstrate the arms?

Danica Shia – Personal Assistant: Not according to the lab. The manipulator arms draw their power from the integral gravity harness the test subject already has. Without that, they're just a basic prosthetic.

CL: Sounds like excuses to me do… wait, did you hear that?

DS: Hear what ma'am?

CL: It sounded like… whispering… I…it… I'm activating the building lockdown and… I think we should talk face to face, can you come to my office?

// LOG ENDS

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